The potential of theories on human learning in quality assurance practices

- *A Case Study from the University of Oslo*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential link between pedagogical perspectives in learning theories and quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at four different institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo. An interpretation of elements in the Norwegian Quality Assurance System with respect to teaching and learning is combined with the discussion of a potential link through content analysis of reported systemic properties and practices in national and institutional documents and pedagogical perspectives in educational psychology. The thesis is suggestive, rather than affirmative in its conclusions and possible implications, and offers an understanding of theories on human learning that can be interpreted as being linked to the quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at selected institutional units at the University of Oslo.

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Finally, my love goes to my husband Ulrik and my daughter Selma for patience and laughter when times are hard!

Abbreviations

NOKUT – The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

UiO – The University of Oslo

MN – The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences

OD – The Faculty of Dentistry

UV – The Faculty of Educational Sciences

HF – The Faculty of Humanities

IFFIK – The Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Arts and Ideas

ILS – The Institute of Teacher Education and School Development

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Presentation of problem area and motivation

"The map is not the territory"

(Albert Korzybski 1933: 190)

During a conversation a few months back with a university professor the researcher was asked about her current occupation, whereupon she answered: master student at the Faculty of Education. The professor, who belongs to a different field, responded with a great dislike of the field of pedagogy, quality assurance and higher education: "What was the point of pedagogy in higher education? Why did he have to spend his valuable time attending courses telling him how to open the door when entering the lecture hall, and how to greet his students? He, who has been lecturing for several years?!" This is obviously not representative of all academic staff and other relevant actors in higher education institutions, but the response is interesting as it alludes to some of the important issues that will be addressed in this thesis. In his response one can read several discourses as to his apparent dislike. First, it seems like he does not value the field of pedagogy, and has not fully grasped that its content goes further than simply the way in which you meet your students. Secondly, he alludes to the fact that he is an experienced lecturer, and is as such not in need of any help in his teaching. Furthermore, he was potentially intrinsically motivated to do a good job on his own accord, and did not want anyone telling him how to lecture his students. With this conversation in mind one can wonder at the role of pedagogical perspectives on quality teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Are they not applicable in a university setting? Do pedagogical quality approaches threaten the academic freedom and autonomy of actors? The example above seems to indicate something to that accord. However, if this is so, or not, the question still remains as to how one can ensure quality in the teaching and learning processes? Can potentially quality assurance practices be an alternative to pedagogical awareness for the actors involved in the core processes of the institution, or are they different perspectives addressing the same concern? The core element in this discussion is the concept of quality, and its many uses.

Quality as a concept has arguably been present in higher education systems and processes for a long time, from the first institutions of higher learning in Egypt, Italy and France, until the modern and diverse research universities and higher education institutions of today. The focus

on quality has been instrumental in the development of knowledge and science, and as such of individuals, organisations and nations. However, as higher education moved from an elite to a massified system, ensuing catering for a broader student cohort and societal interests, the focus on quality took on new perspectives, and was increasingly linked to national and institutional steering mechanisms, rather than the actions of individuals. The functionality of quality assurance systems as steering mechanisms from the perspective of the Evaluative State are indicative of such a change in dynamics within which higher education systems and institutions are steered. According to Neave the Evaluative State encompasses the following:

> "The Evaluative State has as its essential purpose to ensure the continual mobilisation of the higher education system by the regular evaluation of its productivity, performance and its usage of public resources." (Neave 2009: 552)

The Norwegian higher education system has undergone several reform processes the last twenty years, and as a result a quality assurance system as a steering mechanism has been implemented. Furthermore, current debates in Norwegian society address a concern between what is considered to be competing forces within higher education. With the increasing concentration on the knowledge economy combined with considerations of pressures on public expenditure, the university as an instrument for societal change poses pedagogical questions as to the content and outcome of higher education, and from a human capital perspective the production process, understood as the primary processes of research, teaching and learning, and service become a focal point to study. Several studies have been done on the various reform processes such as separate evaluations on the quality assurance system and teaching and learning processes, but none have combined the two by looking at the potential of pedagogical perspectives as an important element. Furthermore, this combination is not a straightforward matter. As expressed by one author

> "Moreover, it is not easy to measure the outcome of quality in higher education. Hence, numerous analysts seem to agree that the impact of quality assurance systems on teaching and learning is difficult to assess and is thus in need of further research." (Kis 2005: 33)

However, the question to be explored in this thesis transports the debate from a macro to a micro level based on the following argument: the primary processes of teaching and learning constitute one of the main functions and aspects of the production process in higher education institutions. The production process is evaluated through a quality assurance system. Hence, the dissemination of knowledge, competencies and skills, and outcome of teaching and

learning are potentially linked to the contents of quality assurance practices. This leads to the question whether the teaching and learning processes are potentially steered through the quality assurance practices as part of the institutional quality assurance system. Three main issues are raised here: knowledge as an instrument in society, knowledge in and of itself and the dissemination process. The first two points refers to a multi-level discourse between society, institution and individual, and the institutional response in the form of for example curriculum development. The last point refers to how individuals learn, academics teach and the actual teaching/learning situation. The focus of this study will concern all three, but narrowed down to an institutional setting.

Certain questions become apparent when referring back to the story of the university professor with a dislike of pedagogical quality practices in higher education in the beginning of this chapter. Do pedagogical perspectives have anything to offer to the core processes in higher education? What about quality in teaching and learning processes? How can they be safeguarded in a climate with increasing pressures and expectations from society and relevant actors as to the performance of higher education institutions? Furthermore, with a broad student cohort, are the same definitions of quality and academic standards still applicable as they were twenty years ago, and if they are how can they be sustained? In the Norwegian context the quality assurance system is seen as part of the solution, as with for example the student and academic quality assurance system at the University of Oslo that specifically targets issues of relevance for the teaching and learning processes. However, are these steering mechanisms meant to replace former intrinsic academic quality standard regulatory mechanisms such as collegial peer review, or do they primarily function as parallel monitoring systems? What role can pedagogical perspectives play in the systemic properties of the quality assurance system? According to the professor in the story in the beginning of this chapter, potentially none. Then again, what if he could be persuaded to embrace pedagogical perspectives and apply them to his work in teaching and learning, and go on a pedagogical mission to all of the academic staff at the university where he works. Would the internal quality assurance system then be made obsolete as an instrument to steer the quality of teaching and learning processes. Probably not. The university in its vast and complex nature cannot be treated as a single cell organism, but rather as an organism of multiple cells that are dependent on each other to function well (e.g. what would the university be without research – not a university, what would teaching be without research – not research-based). Most likely the solution can be found in a golden mean, where pedagogical perspectives and

quality assurance systems are complimentary practices aimed at the same purpose: making sure that the processes at play in higher education are good, with particular emphasis in this context on the processes of teaching and learning. Hence, this study attempts at exploring the potential link between pedagogical perspectives and quality assurance practices on teaching and learning processes at the University of Oslo.

In Human Learning by Susan Ellis Ormrod the author elaborates on the quote that opened this chapter:

> "[] no single human abstraction can entirely and truthfully represent its counterpart in reality. By their very nature, human abstractions are meant to simplify an aspect of life - to make it more understandable and manageable." (Ormrod 2008: 190)

This quote can be transported to the topic in this thesis: the formal systemic properties of the quality assurance system at the University of Oslo cannot fully capture the work on quality in teaching and learning that is actually taking place within the institution. However, the system can potentially simplify certain aspects, and as such make the work on teaching and learning more understandable and manageable. Literature in higher education indicates that this is the case to a certain degree, but there are disagreements as to how, what, where and whom the quality assurance systems impact, as well as concerns of an increased kafkan bureaucracy that produce a lot of documentation which is not utilized to its full potential. This thesis will therefore attempt to explore whether the utility of the quality assurance system and practices on teaching and learning processes in higher education institutions can be better understood through a potential link between pedagogical perspectives and quality system practices. Consequently, this chapter ends with the following question: What are the potential links between a map and its territory?

1.2 Research problem and questions

Research problem:

What are the potential links between pedagogical perspectives and quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo?

Research questions:

1. What are the main elements of the Quality Assurance System in the Norwegian Higher Education System?
2. What are the main elements of the quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo?
3. Which pedagogical perspectives in theories on human learning can offer a deeper understanding of these practices?

1.3 Potential implications

The main elements in the Norwegian quality assurance system are accountability, accreditation and audits, and within these instruments there are external and internal processes with aims at steering different levels and aspects of the higher education system. At the level of institution, the main elements, apart from the formal national quality system framework, are the internal quality assurance instruments. In the context of this study there are several aspects of the internal quality assurance system that have the potential to effect the processes of teaching and learning, as for example participant evaluations and assessments. The potential link between pedagogical perspectives and the quality assurance practices can lie in the formal framework of the external and internal quality assurance system, the internal systemic properties, instruments, interpretations, and institutional traditions. Furthermore, it can be contextual (e.g. actors, institutional level, knowledge field) and multifaceted (e.g. shared and conflicting purposes and traditions), and as such complicated. Hence, the exploration of potential links between pedagogical perspectives and quality assurance practices on teaching and learning can have implications for the design of the systemic properties and instruments, and the expectations of actors as to the impact on quality assurance practices on teaching and learning to mention some. Furthermore, the pedagogical perspectives can offer a deeper understanding of the quality assurance practices, and can thus have implications for the dynamics between quality assurance practices and actors involved in

the teaching and learning processes. Changes in teaching- and assessment practices, sequencing of modules and programs, and the teaching and learning environment are processes that are documented in internal quality assurance reports, and can consequently be affected by the quality system design. However, there are uncertainties as to what the changes that are reported actually contain and mean; whether they are representations of mimicking or symbolic behaviour, and as such document realities rather than representations of what is actually going on in the core processes of teaching and learning. All these elements can be implicated by the potential link between pedagogical perspectives and quality assurance practices in teaching and learning.

Chapter 2 Theoretical background

The following chapter will provide a theoretical background for this study through a literature review and the presentation of an analytical tool.

2.1 Review of literature

> **"Man is the measure of all things: of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not". (Protagoras: xxi)**

The knowledge content of the research problem in this study is divided into three domains considered relevant for the topic and particular scope: 1. Quality assurance as a steering-and management mechanism, 2. Institutional dynamics and processes and 3. Pedagogical perspectives and quality assurance. The discussion of literature covering these three knowledge domains are thus important material in the literature review, and serve as a theoretical background in the study.

2.1.1 Quality assurance as a steering-and management mechanism

> **"[], the public interest in the quality of higher education will best be achieved by designing an institutional framework that encourages the development of strong, effective, collegial mechanisms of academic quality assurance within all institutions of higher education." (Dill & Beerkens 2010: 332)**

There seem to be a high level of agreement in the higher education literature as to the fact that quality assurance policies in Europe are considered important steering mechanisms at system level, as well as at the institutional level. However, there are disagreements surrounding issues as to what, where, how and who they have an impact on, as well as concerns that these policies create an increasing bureaucracy and technocracy within the higher education system. Simultaneously, the literature debates the differences in the effectiveness, efficiency and content of quality assurance mechanisms as steering instruments that have been implemented as part of national reforms, like the 2003 Quality Reform in Norway, and intergovernmental processes such as the Bologna process.

From an historical perspective the concept of quality and evaluation have received increasing attention and undergone considerable development in Western European higher educational systems dating as far back as the 1960s (Neave 2009). According to Neave, the multi level steering mechanisms and procedures within some European higher education systems and

institutions are embedded within a broad framework and a conceptual construct he terms the Evaluative State.

> "Rather, the Evaluative State sets up what is perhaps best described as a broad operating frame in which the functions of definition, implementation, interpretation and verification are split up and assigned to the different agencies and different levels of decision-making within the higher education system, rather than being concentrated within the actual Ministry." (Neave 1998: 272)

There are additional entities to the conceptual construct of the Evaluative State that are important for the context of quality assurance as management and steering mechanisms. Managerialism, New Public Management (NPM) and New Managerialism have been considered an umbrella(s) under which quality assurance policies and mechanisms operate as multi level governance tools. These constructs contain a complex web of political, ideological, managerial and economic perspectives arguing for market mechanisms as regulatory instruments aimed at improving the performance and increasing the accountability of public institutions (Reed 2002, Pollitt 1993, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, Salminen 2003). Arguably, managerialism, new managerialism and new public management may be included in the conceptual construct of the Evaluative State.

According to Neave two important perspectives form part of what he considers a new development and focus on quality and evaluation during the last 25 years (Neave 2009). One is a pure economic perspective where neo-liberalist thought was an important rationale behind policy initiatives and calls for change in public administration during the 1980`s and 90`s. Though some controversy exists as to the actual meaning of neo-liberal thought some important aspects are generic. With the background and tradition of a strong state the idea entails arguments for a need to decrease state control, increase marked mechanisms (such as information, flexibility and competition), and change the public administration in higher education systems due to increasing fiscal constraints and massification. In other words, public expenditure needed to become more efficient, and the actors needed to be held accountable for their actions. The second perspective identified by Neave as forming part of the changes in policies during this period stems from a different camp and encompasses a more social economic perspective. The idea of participant democracy, through increased de-centralisation and autonomy to sectors, institutions, and individuals, results in an increase in ownership and ensuring the participation of more actors in the processes at their actual operating level (Neave 2009). These factors combined with a homogenised legislative base,

financial incentives in the funding system, and the establishment of autonomous intermediary agencies is what Neave has conceptualised as encompassing the Evaluative State (Neave 1998, 2009). Neave states that these steering mechanisms are powerful as they potentially impact all levels of the higher education system.

> "The Evaluative State is powerful precisely because its function is to verify the take-up of polity". (Neave 2009: 559)

Within the conceptual construct of the Evaluative State ideas on participant democracy in the meaning of active involvement for several actors at a specific operating level are considered important influences (Neave 2009). Consequently, this disperses responsibilities with regards to quality assurance practices to the actors that are directly involved with the primary processes and potentially increases the autonomy of the institutions. In contrast to this dimension is the increased professionalization of the administration, leadership and management that may be a consequence of amongst other things the establishment of quality assurance systems. As Musselin points out the strengthening of institutional leadership and institutional autonomy are important aspects in recent higher educational reforms (Musselin 2005).

According to Henkel evaluation in higher education is both summative, what she calls "decision-oriented", and formative, meaning "development-oriented", and she appreciates empirical work utilising theories on learning indicating that student evaluations can be "both theory-driven and of practical use" (Henkel 1998). Furthermore, there is a dilemma within evaluation in higher education between improvement as a developmental mechanism and accountability as a control mechanism. Concerning the diversity of evaluation methods and balancing the enhancement and monitoring aspects of quality assurance instruments Stensaker argues as follows:

> "This lack of agreement, both concerning definitions and organisational practices, draws the attention to the symbolic dimension of quality, and the fact that, although it is a rather poorly defined and loose concept, it has still been a very fashionable one, attracting a lot of interest." (Stensaker 2007: 100)

Hence, underlying the evaluation processes are the symbolic dimension of quality as a loosely defined concept, but at the same time a fashionable and traditional construct at system and institutional level. Simultaneously, higher education authors point to the concept of quality as an enduring and historical concept in higher education. From studium generale, to the establishment of the first universities in Bologna and Paris, the development of research

universities and liberal arts colleges, until the diversified higher education institutions of present, quality has been a vital dimension in the form of for example peer review, and as such is not a new construct to higher education institutions. According to Henkel

> "Evaluation is no stranger to higher education. Internalist evaluation is at the heart of higher education. It is an essential component of the advancement of scientific knowledge (see, e.g. Ziman, 1968), but also in the determination of academic reputation and reward." (Henkel 1998: 291)

The difference, it is argued is rather in the content, procedures and expectations of what the idea of quality and evaluation can accomplish and entail (Westerheijden et al. 2007).

Karslen and Stensaker make a distinction between external (instrumental for society) and internal (institutional) quality (Karlsen and Stensaker 1996). Their model, "Quality Circle for higher education", show that quality in higher education within these two domains are interrelated and viewed as a process (ibid). Furthermore, their work point to the importance of the division of labour and responsibility between the actors involved in the quality processes as well as the existence of different types of evaluation instruments reflected in the degree of measurability, as opposed to learning potential of the procedures (Karlsen and Stensaker 1994, Karlsen and Stensaker 1996). Hence, literature shows the importance of distinguishing between structural and behavioural change, as well as looking at change with regards to distinguishing between the levels and actors in the higher education system. Paradoxically, within the construct of the Evaluative State, the current changes in higher education do not necessarily disrupt the traditional operations and core activities. As such, different higher education researcher distinguishes between radical, limited, paradigmatic and incremental change (Clark 1983, Henkel 1998, Musselin 2005, Neave 2009).

Furthermore, as Musselin points out there are difficulties in actually measuring change dynamics in higher education. Though structural changes result in alterations of instruments, context and purposes, she claims that the dynamics in higher education reforms encompass both change and continuity dependent on the system level (Musselin 2005). In the case of the behaviour of professions Musselin concludes:

> " Thus, while the national reforms deeply affected the governance of higher education systems in European countries, this in turn obliged academics to develop new practices but it barely impacted upon their identities and beliefs. In other words the profession shows more continuity than the policy level, even though it more than before has to adapt to with stronger institutions." (Musselin 2005: 77)

A comparative study conducted in Norway, Sweden and the UK by Kogan and colleagues showed a distinct difference in intensity of change at the various system levels where most were identified at system and least at faculty/institute level (Kogan et al. 2000).

> "One can thus speak of a kind of surface transformation where the deeper layers of the system are rather untouched." (Musselin 2005: 74)

On the one hand, if the policies of the Evaluative State are as potent as argued by Neave one would expect considerable changes even at the faculty/institute level, but on the other hand findings and arguments forwarded by Henkel and Musselin suggest that despite stronger institutional leadership and management there is a high level of continuity in certain aspects of the institutional processes covering actors involvement (Musselin 2005, Henkel 1998).

In sum, as pointed out by higher education researchers, the concept of quality is multifaceted and diverse, and more importantly contextual, and there are uncertainties as to the effectiveness of the quality assurance policies at the micro level of the higher education systems (Westerheijden et al. 2007). On the impact of external quality assurance on academic and educational quality:

> "In contrast, while there is a public interest in the quality of academic governance, institutional administration, strategic planning, financial affairs, and student services, there is little evidence that these processes are as influential on academic standards as the core academic processes of curriculum design, teaching and student assessment (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005)." (Dill and Beerkens 2010: 317)

Hence, there is a rationale for investigating the internal quality assurance practices with respect to core academic processes.

2.1.2 Institutional dynamics and processes

> **"Trying to lead without science is usually ineffective; trying to lead without art is usually sterile. The best administrators are probably both scientists and artists who are able to integrate the two ways of thinking and of processing data." (Birnbaum 1988 on effective administration and leadership)**

The previous section establishes the importance of considering the environment, different operating levels and actors in the quality assurance processes as a means to analyse the quality assurance system, and that the system expectations at macro level are not necessarily accomplished at the micro level. Part of the explanation can be that the actors involved in

these processes are part of an institutional setting in which the quality assurance processes take place. As such, knowledge and understanding of the systemic and formal interaction between the actors and institutional dynamics and processes is valuable in order to answer the research problem in this thesis. Consequently, higher education institutions as academic organisations, and the actors forming part of the institutional processes, have inherent and specific properties that influence quality assurance practices. The actors (students, academics and institutional leadership/management) are part of the organisation /unit as well as active participants (Marheim Larsen et al. 2003). Therefore, the next section will introduce literature on institutional theory considered relevant with respect to investigating a potential link between quality assurance practices and pedagogical perspectives.

Neo-institutional theory takes into consideration not only structural factors in the higher education institution, but also institutional dynamics and processes within a cultural frame of situated norms and objectives (Olsen 2005). As such it is relevant that the tasks in higher education institutions are knowledge-centred and complex, the nature of knowledge fields and disciplines are differentiated, and structures diverse (Clark 1983). As a result competing discourses at different operating levels in the institution can be expected. Clark explains

> "[] knowledge is the basic substance upon which and with which people work in academic systems; teaching and research are the basic activities for fashioning and manipulating this material; these tasks divide into autonomous specialities within which they are closely linked; the task divisions encourage a flat and loosely linked arrangement of work units; this structure promotes a diffusion of control; and finally, purpose is necessarily ambiguous, with broadly worded goals serving as legitimating doctrine for specific goals of operating parts." (Clark 1983: 25)

Birnbaum, who in his construct the cybernetic institution, identifies four models of organisation: the collegial, bureaucratic, political and anarchical institution. To Birnbaum higher education institutions are dynamic organisations, and he stresses the role of the leader, the norms, practices, culture and self-regulating mechanisms as important elements influencing change (Birnbaum 1988). Furthermore, the cybernetic institution acknowledges the importance of institutional norms, objectives and cultures, but rather than seeing the institution as having elements of these at any given time, Birnbaum takes an internalized approach focusing on an integrated model where structural and social control in combination with lines of communication creates feedback loops enabling institutional self-regulation in a context specific environment. He introduces a construct called the institutional thermostat that measures the "temperature" in the institution and proposes that if the temperature reaches a

critical point the institution has feedback loops and lines of communication that will ensure that the problem is addressed. As such, Birnbaum sees the institution as an organic organism with a life system of its own.

> "[]–that is, through self-correcting mechanisms that monitor organisational functions and provide attention cues, or negative feedback, to participants when things are not going well. Systems of negative feedback detect and correct errors so that when something happens at Huxley that moves the college in an undesirable direction, something else automatically happens to bring it back on course (Morgan, 1986). Thus, coordination is provided not by one omniscient and rational agent but by the spontaneous corrective action of the college's parts." (Birnbaum 1988: 179)

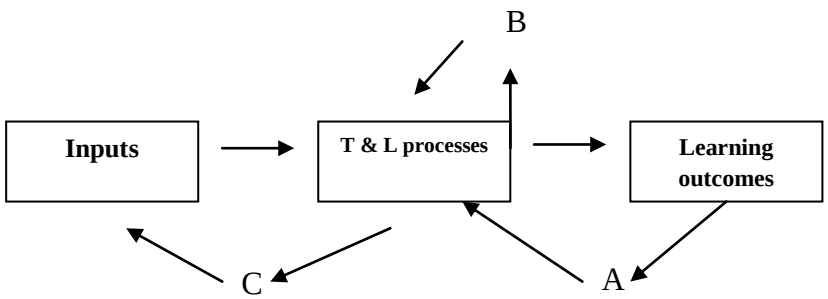
According to Olsen it is important to distinguish between the university as an institution in itself and instrument for society. Furthermore, rules, structure, authority, participation of actors and competitiveness all form part of institutional dynamics of change that are affected by internal and/or external factors (Olsen 2005). Hence, Olsen and Birnbaum identify elements influencing change dynamics in higher education institutions that are relevant for the formal properties of quality assurance practices within an institution. Where the focus in Olsen's model is on the shared and conflicting norms and objectives of actors and steering via internal versus external factors, Birnbaum concentrates on systemic properties and the role of leadership and lines of communication that are vital for feedback loops and institutional self-regulation. Hence, factors such as purpose, institutional cultures and traditions are important elements influencing change dynamics and the take-up of quality assurance policies. Dill and Beerkens concludes in the analysis of the development of public policy instruments on quality that the success of the external quality assurance system in assuring academic standards lies in the internal system of quality assurance and consequently in the institution itself (Dill and Beerkens 2010). Furthermore, they continue:

> " The primary challenge for each nation is therefore to design and implement a rigorous, evidence-based method of external quality assurance, which is focused on enhancing and improving the core university processes for assuring academic standards. The ultimate goal of such external quality assurance should be for universities themselves to become genuine "learning organisations" (Dill 1999), in which the institution's assurance of academic standards demonstrably involves: evidence-based decision making utilizing accepted canons of scholarly inquiry; peer accountability for the quality of academic programs and the rigor of relevant unit-level decision-making; and systematic identification and dissemination of best practice in improving teaching and student learning." (Dill and Beerkens 2010: 332)

Higher education institutions have structural properties that make them different from regular business enterprises (Clark 1983, Birnbaum 1988). Birnbaum elaborates on the institutional units as loosely coupled and tightly coupled structures that exist and function independently of each other according to the tightness and/or looseness of the connection with the institutional structure as a whole (Birnbaum 1988). Furthermore, Birnbaum introduces the concept of a black box as a way to explain why some of the institutional responses are not possible to understand in detail (ibid). The actors do not have access to the mechanisms in the black box, and consequently it is not possible to establish a pure line of causality in the institutional responses (ibid). As a result, it would according to Birnbaum be almost impossible to detect the impact actions taken by the quality assurance system and/or actors involved as a result of a detected problem. He even goes so far as to say that in certain circumstances it is best to take no action at all by the leadership of the organisation (ibid). Hence, in light of institutional theory designing a quality assurance system is complicated as it is difficult to establish causality between problem, response and results.

However, Massy offers an interesting model of education quality audits describing the production of quality education within an institution where feedback loops are based on well-grounded data creating a quality improvement process. In this table chart A identifies the role of the academics in measuring learning outcomes, aims and responses, B internal and external institutional process adjustments, and C changes in input factors (Massy 2010).

Model 2.1 Quality improvement process according to Massy (Massy 2010: 206).



This supports the point made by Birnbaum of the importance of lines of communication and feedback loops in order to secure institutional response.

Furthermore, some higher education scholars have elaborated on the risk of symbolic action and institutional mimicking with respect to institutional quality assurance systems and that institutional response are affected by the level of consequentiality inherent in the system (Karlsen and Stensaker 1993, Ewell 2007). On the one hand symbolic action could in the case of the internal system of quality assurance entail that the formal system structures, rules and procedures are implemented as system standards, but that no "real" action" takes place between the actors involved. On the other hand the subunits may mimic the behaviour of another unit that has been rewarded by the institution for a particular successful practice.

As such, evaluation as a multi level political process raises questions regarding what type of rationality is involved in the evaluation processes, and Henkel differentiates between evaluation as creating an environment of conformity and an environment that is development oriented (Henkel 1998). Arguably, the balance between quality assurance systems as monitoring and improvement oriented procedures has the potential to create conflict between actors in the higher education system, as well as within the institutions themselves. According to Birnbaum institutional policies on quality will play out within a framework of bounded rationality, meaning that institutional behaviour and responses will be affected by available information and context within the construct of the cybernetic institution (Birnbaum 1988). As such, the traditions within the institution will play an important role in the institutional response to quality assurance systems. Furthermore it affects the ability for the institution to learn and in order for the quality assurance practices to be effective the organisation has to be willing to change – to be a learning organisation.

> "[]A learning organization is a place] where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." (Senge 1990: 41)

In sum, important elements in a discussion on quality assurance practices from an institutional perspective are the hierarchical levels of the institution, the tight and loose coupling of entities, the relationships between actors and structures, lines of communication and feedback loops, as well as goals and incentives for quality assurance inherent in the system.

2.1.3 Pedagogical perspectives in human learning and quality assurance.

> **"Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group." (Dewey 1916: 47)**

The understanding of pedagogical perspectives is connected to several dimensions, and some general understandings and interpretations will be introduces as background material for the more specific theoretical content that will be covered in chapter three. Furthermore, these perspectives and theories will be linked to relevant higher education literature concerned with educational quality in higher education.

For example, in higher education literature the concept of pedagogy is often used in relation to discussions on teaching and learning, but it is also seen as a broad concept that encompasses a wide range of knowledge fields. It is interdisciplinary in its knowledge content and consequently has a variety of epistemological, ontological, psychological, sociological, philosophical and historical knowledge dimensions. Therefore, the understanding and knowledge of the core processes of higher education institutions from a pedagogical perspective is not a straightforward matter, as it can be seen to involve a wide range of processes at play in higher education institutions, from matters of institutional identity, curriculum development, didactics, teaching and learning strategies, all of which potentially have implications for the academic standards inherent in the higher education institution. As such, the conceptual construct of pedagogical perspectives has a broad meaning in this instance. Consequently, in terms of the internal quality assurance system and practices, pedagogical perspectives are relevant with respect to the core educational processes.

> " If evaluative issues encompass knowledge of process, of what enables students to learn, as well as substantive knowledge of the subject, it is obvious that evaluative criteria can be derived from educational theory, the psychology of learning, or even educational technology, subjects which most academics regard as outside their area of competence and not worthy of their attention (Gibbs 1995)." (Henkel 1998: 294)

Hence, different knowledge fields contain pedagogical perspectives that potentially are relevant for quality assurance practices.

Furthermore, the concept of pedagogy is often considered the underdog of knowledge fields, especially in the higher education sector, and it is frequently alluded to as merely a practical tool in teaching situations for children. Hence, a claim can be made that its potential in other areas of higher education have not been fully realized. According to Vestergaard pedagogy is

both theory and practice in the sense that theories have normative implications for the practical methodology applied to educational activities (Vestergaard 2005). Nonetheless, a contribution to the discussion of applicability of pedagogy in higher education is the introduction by Knowles, Holton and Swanson of the antonym andragogy (Knowles et al. 2005). This concept is highly relevant in the context of higher education as its focus started out on human learning of the adult learner, as distinctly different from the learner as a child. The andragogy of practice offers theories on human learning and teaching which in the beginning assumed that children and adults learn differently, and interestingly this distinction has become more multifaceted since the concept was first introduced (ibid). Apart for having implications for the understanding of learning in a broader sense, the concept affects the role of the teacher into being more process-oriented, rather than content-oriented (ibid). Furthermore, Knowles et al. argues that this andragagical model is relevant for the administrative workings of institutions (ibid). As a consequence this theory creates a shift of focus with regards to teaching and learning that take into consideration new interpretations when adopting learning theories to plans, aims, structures and processes involved in producing and developing human capital in an institutional setting (ibid). Hence, it is pertinent to ask if not pedagogy can offer the same? Potentially actors involved in the quality assurance of core processes in higher education at the appropriate operating levels benefit from asking themselves pedagogical questions concerning the plans, practices, structures, standards and measures of student and academic quality. Alternatively, these questions are considered irrelevant, thus devaluing the potential link between pedagogical perspectives and quality assurance practices. However, as articulated by the educational psychologist Bruner

> "Education research, if it is to be effective in the broader society, must extend its concern, as it is now doing, beyond the classroom and beyond the pedagogy narrowly defined. It needs also to participate in the task of discerning the consequences of such culturally constituted ends as a society prescribes for its education system. Education research, under the circumstances, becomes a cultural science, however much it may rely on methods developed in the natural sciences." (Bruner 1999: 23)

What is more, assessment has a long tradition as an internal and external selection function; more recently also as a monitoring and accreditation instrument linked to societal needs, and with an increasing attention to socio-cultural contexts (Gipps 1999). Hence, it is of importance to develop new assessment strategies of core educational processes (ibid).

As pointed out by Karseth on curriculum reform processes

> "Teaching is not any longer "privately owned". An increased focus on quality and accountability makes teaching an object of evaluation by the teacher her/himself as well as by others (students, external evaluators." (Karseth 2006: 275)

Consequently, based on the knowledge on quality assurance as a management and steering mechanism the quality assurance practices affects institutional units as well as actors, and an understanding of the systemic properties and formal interaction within the institution can be useful. In the words of Westerhejiden et al.

> "[] there is a need to improve our theoretical knowledge about the micro processes of higher education, and to be more open to the possible contributions from theories of learning when designing quality assurance schemes in higher education." (Westerheijden et al. 2007: 4)

Therefore, the focus in this study will be on pedagogical perspectives in the psychology of education, more specifically on theories of human learning. Moreover, a differentiation is made between the utility of human learning theories with respect to the organisational, administrative and leadership potential to learn (through the internal evaluation systems, structures, procedures and practices), and the potentially interconnected teaching and learning processes.

According to Berliner educational psychology has undergone two paradigm shifts since its early beginnings in the late 19th century, first from a behaviourist to a cognitive view on human learning, second to a socio-cultural and contextual view on learning (Berliner 2006).

> "The latter shift was from the study of the individual to the study of the individual situated *in* and bringing a socio-cultural history *to* a context that exerts powerful influences on thoughts and actions of all those in that context" (Berliner 2006: 21)

Furthermore, he claims that this is the main paradigm within educational psychology today (ibid). However, Ormrod expresses a dislike for a tendency amongst some researchers as to this need for categorisation, and stresses the complex and intertwined nature of the different theories (Ormrod 2008). As such, it is important to distinguish between topics addressed when attempting to create an overall impression and interpretation of the complimentary and conflicting aspects within learning theories. Examples of three such topics are cognition, motivation and individual differences (Berliner 2006).

As suggested by D´Andrea and Gosling there are possible connections between external quality reviews and learning theory which may serve as useful knowledge in the construction and application of external and internal reviews (D´Andrea and Gosling 2005). In the article in Westerhejiden et al. they use a table describing major categories of learning theory from a psychological perspective as a backdrop to compare specific examples of practices containing the following dimensions: behaviourist, cognitive, humanist and social and situational theories (D`Andrea 2007). Please see appendix I. Important aspects concerning learning process, purpose of education and educators role within these dimensions are identified and used as examples applicable to learning theory in quality reviews (ibid). Furthermore, they devised a table of different categories comparing two aspects in quality reviews: quality assessment (measurement/ external accountability/regulatory control) and quality enhancement (curriculum development/teaching &learning/formative feedback) of internal quality assurance systems with foci on values (intrinsic/ extrinsic), authority (internal/ external), summative instruments, formative instruments, educational process, learning outcome, academic capability, administrative capability, measurability- and comprehension of data. They concluded with the following:

> "Through the analysis of selected examples of quality review mechanisms it has become apparent that there is a scope for quality reviews to be underpinned and framed by various types of learning theory. More importantly, when this is done the opportunities for using the macro-level quality review findings to improve micro-level teaching and learning activities is also more evident." (D ´Andrea 2007: 219)

In addition, D´Andrea and Gosling mentions the concept of conversation as a factor in enabling organisations to be learning institutions (D´Andrea and Gosling 2005). With this in mind, the construct of the Evaluative State can have the potential to ensure the take-up of polity in the micro-processes if adding the conceptual construct of a conversational institution to the equation.

2. 2 Presentation of an analytical tool

> **"It would seem that from this initial discussion it can be concluded that quality reviews in higher education could contribute more to the micro-level improvement of teaching and learning in higher education if policy makers consciously considered the application of learning theory to the macro-level process." (D`Andrea 2007: 221)**

The content in the research problem has been deconstructed into the three knowledge domains discussed in section 2.1.1. 2.1.2 and 2.1.3. Based on an understanding and interpretation of these knowledge domains, an attempt is made at creating an analytical tool. This analytical tool will serve as a guide through the presentation of the theoretical and empirical data, the subsequent understanding, discussion, and main findings of the research problem and questions in this study. Furthermore, human learning theory will be the pedagogical focus in this thesis as it is considered relevant from the point of view of the behaviour of the main actors and processes at the institutional level; be it the institution itself, the academics or the students, and the systemic properties inherent in the internal quality assurance system. It is an interesting focus as it offers a wider understanding of the content, regulation and procedures of the system practices, and the potential for change in the micro processes of higher education institutions.

The analytical tool is created based on adaptations of the aspects on learning theory presented by D´Andrea (D´Andrea 2007). Additional aspects have been added as a result of the interpretation of the substantive and formative theoretical background presented in the literature review. These themes stand out from the literature on quality assurance, institutional theory and pedagogical perspectives on human learning as relevant and important. Please see table 2.2 on page 21.

Table 2.2. An analytical tool addressing the theoretical and empirical content, the potential link, utility and possible application of learning theory in the internal quality assurance system practices of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo.

Step 1		**Step 3**	**Step 2**	**Step 4**
Aspects of Content Learning theories		**Potential Link ←→**	***Quality Assurance Practices***	***Aspects of learning theories***
Behaviourist	***View of the learning process***	**Types of practices ←→**	***Practices, processes and instruments***	***Applied***
Cognitive				***Visible***
Individual/Humanist				
Social and situational	***Purpose in education***	**Purpose ←→**	***The purpose of practices***	***Potential for application***
	Educators role	**Institutional conversation ←→**	***Role of actors, communication and information***	

Table 2.2 represents the content of four analytical steps in this thesis:

Step 1. Present the four aspects of learning theory with the focus on specific content in column 2.

Step 2. Present main elements on the quality assurance practices corresponding to step 1.

Step 3. Explore potential link between the two.

Step 4. Explore which aspects of learning theories are applied, visible and have potential for application in the quality assurance practices.

Chapter 3 Pedagogical perspectives on theories of human learning

> **"To reflect on *any* act of teaching and learning demands thinking about individual differences, development, the nature of the subject matter being taught, problem solving, assessment, and transfer. These psychological topics are central to education, and therefore are central to human social life" (Berliner 2006: 4)**

The following chapter will address the main theoretical content in the aspects of theories on human learning that have been identified in the literature review and presented in the analytical tool. Furthermore, an attempt will be made at identifying potential expectations and types of quality assurance practices that can be deducted from the different aspects of learning theories. Hence, the content in the theories will be presented focusing on the following dimensions: view of the learning process, purpose in education and educators role.

3.1 Aspects of learning theories: behaviourism, cognitive, individual and humanist, and social and situational

Educational psychology offers knowledge on how humans learn from a pedagogical perspective. According to Berliner

> "Our essential concern is a set of related fundamental topics about human teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on the empirical study of those phenomena." (Berliner 2006: 5)

As mentioned in the literature review the four different aspects of learning theory are not mutually exclusive, they are interconnected and the most influential in psychology is currently the social/situational theories on learning (Berliner 2006). Social/situational theories can be seen as integrating aspects from the three other theoretical aspects, as well as containing dimensions that differentiates them from each other. The concept of metacognition can serve as an image of commonalities between theories on human learning and quality assurance practices, and refers to the learner's knowledge of own learning- and cognitive process, and self-regulation (Ormrod 2008). The key word here is self-regulation, which involves processes of goal setting, planning, self-motivation, learning strategies, self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-reflection to mention some (ibid). All of these are elements that can be transported from the individual learner to the systemic properties of quality assurance practices, as aspects that are present in, and offer meaning to the

expectations of, quality assurance practices. However, for the purpose of this study it is interesting to use the four learning aspects separately as they contain differences in the way people learn, and as such can be helpful in identifying different perspectives of the potential link between learning theories and quality assurance practices. The different aspects will be addressed by focusing on interpretations of influential researchers and scientists that are connected to each aspect, and general knowledge in the field. Please see table below.

Table 3.1 Examples of influential researchers/practitioners in educational psychology.

Behaviourist aspect	*Cognitivist aspect*	*Individual and humanist Aspect*	*Social and situational aspect*
Thorndike, Pavlov, Skinner	Piaget, Gagné, Köhler	Maslow, Rogers and Glasser	Vygotsky, Bandura and Solomon.

The chapter is primarily based on interpretations of the theoretical understanding on the respective theories through the work of Ormrod, and using the elements presented in the model by D´Andrea in the literature review (Ormord 2008, D´Andrea 2007).

3.2 View of the learning process

According to D`Andrea the *behaviourst theories* are primarily concerned with learning as leading to changes in behaviour (D´Andrea 2007). Interpretations of the theories developed by Thorndike states that his framework is mechanical in nature, and that his approach was to create experimental laboratory designs to investigate learning, without any concern as to what was going on in the field. On connectionist theory of learning

> "The newer pedagogy of arithmetic……scrutinizes every element of knowledge, every connection made in the mind of the learner, so as to choose those which provide the most instructive experiences, those which will grow together into an orderly, rational system of thinking about numbers and quantitative facts." (Thorndike 1922: 17)

Hence, learning from a behaviourist perspective is concerned with mechanical structures and rational thinking as a means to accomplish learning with a focus on effective achievement and end results.

Furthermore, the learning process is connected to what is called positive and negative reinforcers (Ormrod 2008). As such, positive and negative feedback, as well as punishment or

consequences for undesired behaviour will impact the learning process. In this respect it is according to Ormrod important to distinguish between "encouraging" reinforcement and "discouraging" punishment (Ormrod 2008: 79). However, both can lead to the desired change in behaviour. As such, behaviourist theories on learning can be claimed to focus on surface transformations rather than internalised learning processes. Consequently, a change can be identified if a restless student finally settles down to concentrate after repeatedly being scorned for unwanted behaviour.

In terms of quality assurance practices the potential application of behaviourist aspects can lead to an expectation of a rational framework identifying declarative knowledge and attempts at controlling the processes in the context which the practices are taking place. As such, summative elements in quality assurance practices, such as the recording of student output and grade distributions can be considered quality assurance practices that are compatible with behaviourist perspectives. These practices will offer declarative knowledge on teaching and learning and the behaviour of students.

Moreover, reinforcers from the perspective of behaviourist theories can lead to expectations of quality assurance practices to mechanically structure the systemic properties in such a way as to steer the actors towards desired behavioural change. An example of quality assurance practices that operate with reinforcers as part of the framework can be incentive driven educational awards that are presented at institutions where actors (e.g. students and academics) are rewarded for their "good behaviour", for example good pedagogical practices. However, this aspect also coincides with the concepts of *modelling* and *signalling* that is primarily regarded as belonging to individual/humanist and social cognitive theory (will be addressed later in this chapter). The difference between the three is that in the first instance the award functions as an observed behaviour that is recognised as positive, whilst in the case of the latter two it involves internal cognitive learning processes. As such, reinforcers from a behaviourist perspective can be seen to be limited to potential symbolic behavioural changes, but in the case of modelling and signalling one can claim a transformational effect for the actors involved. Furthermore, the systemic properties that clearly distribute authority and responsibility (i.e. control) of quality assurance practices to specific actors can be considered compatible with behaviourist theories, as for example when the system is anchored through leadership structures. However, this can only be of effect from the perspective of behaviourist theories if the properties are able to detect and *react* towards unwanted behaviour: e.g.

incentives for behavioural change through consequentiality. Hence, it is dependent on systemic feedback mechanisms and a combination of declarative and procedural knowledge, that result in observed quality measures being executed by relevant actors.

In contrast, *cognitive theories* on learning stress the internal mental processes within the learner as the vital elements of the learning process. In the words of D´Andrea the cognitivist aspect includes "internal mental processes (including insight, information, processing, memory and perception)" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). For example, the level of insight, or self-efficacy will affect the learning process of a student, by acknowledging own strengths and weaknesses in cognitive ability. Furthermore, according to Piaget the learning process entails the mental organisation of experiences, and as such is a constructive process (Ormrod 2008).

> "A good deal of Piaget´s theory focused on the development of the cognitive structures that govern logical reasoning – structures that Piaget called operations" (Ormrod 2008: 311).

These operations are structures that develop and create meaning to objects and knowledge in a learner's life.

An important part of the cognitive aspect is gestalt psychology represented by amongst others Köhler. These theories proclaim that the learner organises and structures experiences mentally based on previous knowledge (Ormrod 2008). As such, they correspond with Piaget and his focus on structures. In addition, to cognitive theorists such as Gagné the understanding of how memory works is important, and he attributes meaning to the way in which knowledge is stored through a coding process that is relational (ibid). Hence, the information accumulated by a student is coded, for example linked to concepts or previous experiences and potentially stored in long-term memory. Furthermore, these meanings are interrelated, and as stated by Ormrod "stored in a networklike fashion" (Ormrod 2008: 243). Most importantly and in the word of Ormrod

> "Learning involves the formation of mental representations or associations that are not necessarily reflected in overt behaviour" (Ormrod 2008: 162)

In addition, attention is seen as one of the major elements influencing the learning process (Ormrod 2008). If the concentration of the learner continually wanders off, qualitative learning cannot take place. Being mentally present in the learning process is a prerequisite in cognitive theories.

Furthermore, interaction is vital, and learning occurs through the processing of previous internal knowledge into adapted or new versions (ibid). This focus on interaction and participation in the learning process means that the students control their own learning in a way that behaviourist learning processes do not acknowledge. Finally, the learning process and content must seem meaningful for the student (ibid). The more meaningful the learning experience, the greater the chances are that actual learning will take place.

Cognitive theories put expectations on the main actors of the quality assurance system to structure and internalise the quality processes, meaning that the practices and their effect are not seen as mere changes in the behaviour, but in cognitive awareness and appreciation of actors involved. In a sense, quality assurance practices can become a learning process in its own right as the organisation has the potential to cement experiences into system structures, as well as the actual potential for learning that becomes inherent in the actors (e.g. student and academics). An example of a quality assurance practice that is compatible with a cognitive perspective is self-evaluations on teaching and learning processes conducted by the academic staff. Self-evaluation can be considered a cognitive change process as it potentially involves internalising and reflecting on individual practices and processes.

Furthermore, another important element of cognitive theories that can be adapted to quality assurance practices is the role of self-reflection on weaknesses and strengths. In some quality assurance practices, identifying weaknesses and strengths form part of the documentation templates in plans and reports, and as such corresponds to the constructive and internal dimensions of cognitive theories. Furthermore, the focus on meaningful interaction between actors (e.g. student and lecturer) in cognitive theories is potentially vital for quality assurance practices to function. For example, the formal lines of communication that are established through quality system structures can provide internalised knowledge and potentially ensure two-way communication between actors (e.g. between programme of study coordinator responsible for quality assurance reports and academic staff responsible for course evaluations). However, one of the most important contributions of cognitive theories to understanding quality assurance practices is the emphasis on the learning process being meaningful to the actors. For the systemic properties of quality assurance practices to function well they should according to cognitive learning theory be experienced as meaningful to the actors involved. Student evaluations have the potential to be experienced as being meaningful if they are connected to elements in behaviourist aspects of learning

theories, namely response and consequentiality. Furthermore, as a consequence of the internalised nature of learning in cognitive theories, actors should be given the control over the quality practices that affect them directly, for example through quality practices that link students tightly to the overall process of course evaluations (e.g. student evaluations that are initiated and conducted by students themselves).

The *individual and humanist* theories on human learning are largely associated with Maslow, and involve how motivation affects learning.

> "Humanism has its roots in counselling psychology and focus its attention on how individuals acquire emotions, attitudes, values, and interpersonal skills" (Ormrod 2008:458).

Maslow identified five hierarchies of needs: psychological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (Ormrod 2008). With the risk of oversimplification, the learning process should take into account whether the student is able to think positively, and furthermore by following the hierarchical levels ensuring that needs in each category are catered for the learner to reach self-actualisation. In humanist theory it is the learner that is in the centre, hence adding the concept of individual to the theoretical aspect. According to Halse it is "actualisation of self" that drives the learner, which thus puts motivation in the forefront of the learning process (Halse 1988: 189). Consequently, the student is either self-motivated, or receives motivating signals from the environment. Furthermore, the learner is assessing his/her behaviour resulting in an internalised learning process (Halse 1988).

According to D´Andrea the learning process in humanist theories is "a personal act to fulfil potential" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). In combination with aspects of motivation this means that the learning process involves intrinsic and extrinsic dynamics, and that the learner must feel related to her/his environment (Ormrod 2008).

> "To perform most effectively in the classroom, learners should be motivated to do their best yet not overly anxious about their performance." (Ormrod 2008:482)

For example, if the subject field taught is motivated singularly toward the end exam and grades, one can say that a low achievement student is motivated by external factors, and anxiety at reaching a performance goal may be the result. However, if the learning process is geared towards development goals, such as improvement, motivation can take a more positive form, be guided by intrinsic qualities such as curiosity, and anxiety can be avoided. To sum

up, the learning process starts from the student in terms of motivation, ability, curiosity and development. In the words of Knowles et al. on Rogers

> "A person learns significantly only those things which he perceives as being involved in the maintenance of, or enhancement of, the structure of self". (Knowles et al 2005: 46)

Implications in the expectations of quality assurance practices from the perspective of individual/humanist can be associated with the role that motivation directly or indirectly play in the quality system processes. Applying individual/humanist theories to expectations in quality assurance practices entails catering for the self-motivation of actors (students, academics, institutional leadership/management and administration) and that the systemic properties and higher education environment contain or produce signals that motivate the actors in their focus on quality. These signals will consequently affect the essence of the practices. For example, if the institutional quality reporting templates ask for quantitative student output data, student/staff ratio and grade distribution in order to check the teaching and learning processes, the template signals the actors what type of documentation the system requires. In this instance the system then produces documentation primarily with the aim to control the teaching and learning activities. However, if the template in addition asks for problem areas, suggestions on follow-up and plans to address problems, the systemic properties signals that documentation with improvement-oriented dimensions are required. Hence, the signals sent by the system will potentially affect the motivation of actors to be either control- or development oriented. Furthermore, in individual/humanist learning theories it is the individual (i.e. the student, the academic or the programme of study coordinator) that is in the centre of the learning process. Combined with the significance of positive thinking for the motivation of the individual learner the following can be deducted to be of relevance for the quality practices of teaching and learning processes. Quality assurance practices that targets student learning environments positively by enabling the student to reach self-actualisation, such as social and academic student groups working with quality issues from a student perspective. Alternatively, from an individual perspective, individual student-lecturer evaluations of courses and mentoring/tutoring quality assurance practices.

In the *social and situational aspect* of learning the learning process involves observation: the behaviour of others as well as outcomes of those behaviours (Ormrod 2008). What is more, learning can happen without behavioural change, i.e. cognitive change. As with the example earlier of the restless student, even though the student is seemingly not restlessly wandering

around, cognitively the student may still be in a state of flux. Furthermore, social and situational learning processes encompass potential consequences for ones actions, cognition and personal control of the situation (ibid). As such, students have the opportunity to learn from each others behaviour, as well as form their educators in an interactive social process. An important concept in this context is modelling: live modelling (e.g. a dancer performing a pirouette), symbolic modelling (e.g. Virginia Woolf in a biography), or verbal instruction (e.g. rules of conduct at UiO). According to Bandura four conditions must be in place for the individual to be receptive towards modelling: attention, retention (remember), motor reproduction (replicate), and motivation (Ormrod 2008). The last condition is important, and Ormrod explains it as follows:

> "Learners must want to demonstrate what they have learned." (Ormrod 2008: 135)

According to D´Andrea the learning process in social and situational theories involves "interaction/ observation in social contexts. Movement from the periphery to the centre of communities of practice (D´Andrea 2007: 214). According to Vygotsky learning processes take place informally and formally within a cultural environment, and both physical and cognitive instruments are part of this process (Ormrod 2008). As such, meaning is socially constructed within a specific setting, and in interrelation with others (ibid). Hence, the learning process is situated in for example the context of a dance class, and happens in an interaction between the members of the dance class, the educator and dance community. Furthermore, human learning occurs by relating knowledge to already established cognitive knowledge where repetition is essential for the learning to cement itself within the learner. As cognitive views on learning form part of social and situational views on learning the following quote is included in this section.

> "Furthermore, although a certain amount of feedback is essential for learning to take place, occasional rather than continual feedback about one's performance may sometimes promote performance over the long run, even though it may result in slower improvement initially (Schmidt&Bjork, 1992)." (Ormrod 2008: 230)

From the perspective of social/situational theories on human learning quality assurance practices can be expected to be interactive in nature, and as such involve all participants in the higher education institution. What is more, the systemic properties would take into account and cater for the context in which they operate, as for example catering for site-specific needs due to differences in knowledge fields and traditions in institutional units. The practices

would be aimed at internal and external observation of actors and processes, and encompass informal and formal communication. Finally, there would be an expectation that the actors perform roles as models in the quality system, and in the teaching and learning processes. Quality assurance practices such as institutional awards can become instruments to that effect if they have both internal and external motivation properties within them. D´Andrea gives an example of this from a university in the United Kingdom were the award was developed into being a learning process with the actors involved, and as such creating communities of practice (D ´Andrea 2007). Furthermore, examples of quality assurance practices that are compatible with social/situational theories of learning are procedures such as quality seminars, meetings and networks for all relevant actors aimed at creating a participatory quality system.

3.3 Purpose in Education

An integral part of *behaviourist theory* is the model of classical conditioning partly developed by Pavlov through his experimentation on dogs, simply stressing the role of repeated stimulus to acquire a desired response even though initial motivation has been removed (Ormrod 2008). As a consequence, the aim in education using the words of D´Andrea is to "produce behavioural change in desired directions" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). The argumentation is based on the mechanical model that Thorndike and Skinner represent.

> " A response that is followed by a reinforcer is strengthened and is therefore more likely to occur again" (Paraphrase of Skinner by Ormrod 2008: 51)

Consequently, the behaviourist perspective can support the instrumental and utility function of education, if employed mechanically. Furthermore, the assessment as to whether learning has been taking place is ultimately linked to the identification of these changes (Ormrod 2008). According to Ormrod, behaviourist perspectives are primarily suitable in specific educational settings and actors (ibid). For example, they are helpful in dealing with complex and problematic educational situations and actors (ibid). As such, unwanted practice of actors in education can be forced to change their behaviour if the behaviour is repeatedly given negative consequences for those performing them.

If applied to quality assurance the behaviourist perspective creates a focus on control as a purpose of quality assurance practices, as for example in identifying changes in the behaviour of actors in teaching and learning processes or the systemic properties themselves.

Furthermore, the focus can be directed specifically to difficult problem areas, and if applied with consequentiality change can occur. Quality assurance practices such as accreditation/ reaccreditation of programmes of study can be interpreted as being an example of such a practice.

The purpose in education related to *cognitivists* can be interpreted through the focus on the internal change processes within the individual. The change in knowledge is not necessarily linked to a change in behaviour, and as such the purpose in education is to achieve an internal transformation of the students. Therefore, the cognitive aspects stating to enabling the individual in the development of skills and competences, and hence educate themselves, are important. In the words of D´Andrea the learner should "develop capacity and skills to learn better" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). From a cognitivist perspective, due to the internal nature of the cognitivist theories, memory plays an important role in the learning process. Learning is directly linked to the acquisition of knowledge, and memory serves as a registering and processing mechanism (short-term and long-term) (Ormrod 2008). As such, a claim can be made that the purpose in education is linked to the development of human capital in the knowledge society.

Expectations of quality assurance practices deducted from cognitive learning theories can involve the focus on the internal transformation of the individual actor. As such, the purpose of the quality assurance practices would be to concentrate the quality processes on the situations that most directly affected the development of skills and competences for the actors, e.g. the student learning experience. In the case of the academic staff, quality assurance practices that develop the pedagogical skills of a lecturer, e.g. pedagogical development courses, are an example of such a practice.

In *individual and humanist* theories the purpose is to create an independent and responsible individual according to the learners own premise. According to D´Andrea to "become self-actualised, autonomous" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). Furthermore, the open framework of individual and humanist learning processes attaches responsibilities to the learner. Halse explains

> "If children are being actively pulled into the life of the institution, they are also being made responsible for the work that is being done. As such, the role of the school is about finding the motivation that fits the purpose, which today is seldom about feeling secure, but rather social- and self-worth motivation." (Halse 1988: 193)

Humanism is more a philosophical perspective, rather than psychological (Ormrod 2008). As such, in educational circumstances the perspective is linked to the concept of *Bildung*: meaning development of the self by seeking the truth (Schnack 1983). In current societal debates in Norway this concept is linked to the competing discourses between the higher education institution as an autonomous organisation and the instrumental views on higher education. This is relevant in curriculum matters at a system as well as institutional level, and relates to the Kantian "in and of itself" versus the utility function in higher education.

From an individual humanist perspective the purpose of quality assurance practices would be linked to the individual actor's status as an autonomous participant in the quality assurance system. Two examples can be mentioned in this regard. The first relates to curriculum development, and the role played by the individual course lecturer for the assessment of evaluations and consequent potential changes in course material. The second example involves the student, and refers to the personal academic plan that is in some instances considered a quality assurance instrument.

In *social and situational theories* the purpose of education becomes holistic. Furthermore, it is contextual, and as such corresponds to Dewey's progressive and pragmatic view on education. Potentially, he would be supportive of this shift of paradigms as Berliners put it (Berliner 2006). The close connection between the development of society and democracy that Dewey identified corresponds to aspects in the social and situational theories. In D´Andreas words the purpose of education in social and situational aspects are "full participation in communities of practice and utilisation of resources." (D´Andrea 2007: 214). As an example, it is the community of scholars, students and academics, and their full participation in educational matters that is of relevance.

From the perspective of social/situational theories of learning the expectations of the purpose of quality assurance practices is primarily connected to the level of participation by relevant actors. Hence, quality assurance practices that emphasis full participation from higher education actors at all levels are compatible with such a purpose. Hence, the level of representation of students, academic staff, leadership, management and administrators in for example institutional boards, councils, commissions and committees can be seen to be instruments that operate within a social/situational perspective. Furthermore, practices that diffuse responsibility to site-specific levels is also within the confines of this perspective, e.g.

a practice where a problem between a student and an academic is solved at the level were the problem has surfaced.

3.4 Educators role

In *behaviourist theories* it is considered that the result of learning is influenced by actions happening in the environment where learning is taking place (Ormrod 2008). As such it is situated and not necessarily applicable in other settings. In the words of D´Andrea the role of the behaviourist educator is to "arrange the environment to elicit desires responses" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). In this is the assumption that situations can be controlled, and that the educator can accomplish this control. Furthermore, according to Ormrod the behavioural psychologist Skinner contributes with a determinist perspective in the sense that knowledge of stimuli and response results in the prediction of behaviour (Ormrod 2008). As such, practice is important in the sense that repetition of stimuli and response will lead to desired behaviour from student (ibid).

> "Ideally, then, students should be active respondents throughout the learning process, rather than simply passive recipients of whatever information and skill is being taught." (Ormrod 2008: 45)

For behaviourists the learner starts out as a blank slate to be filled with knowledge, tabula rasa, which entails that the educator becomes a vital element in the potential learning outcome. Hence, the educator is strongly influential in directing the learning process.

Furthermore, in order to learn, behaviourists stress the importance of a positive learning environment (Ormrod 2008). For example, in the connectionist theories developed by Thorndike the satisfaction linked to the response was an important element (ibid). Consequently, an important part of the role of the educator is to create and arrange the surroundings in such a way that the students feel comfortable and open towards the field being taught. In addition, using reinforcers such as clarity of aims, identify potential consequences, and follow though on the articulated repercussions are important for the behaviourist practitioner, and facilitates communication with the learner (ibid). As an example, if a student is told that talking in the classroom will lead to being expelled, the teacher must enforce this if the talking does not stop.

As a consequence, the expectations on quality assurance practices from a behaviourist perspective entails that the academic staff play a significant role in assuring quality by way of creating a controllable system that is context specific, i.e. caters for local needs. Furthermore,

there would be expectations as to the academic staff or the programme/faculty/institutional leadership to direct the quality processes through an assessment of predictable responses from the actors involved. An example could be quality assurance practices that have distinct and clear repercussions connected to them, such as incentive-based funding systems targeted at specific teaching and learning processes or quality assurance practices.

In *cognitivist* learning theories the educator should be careful of the way that the learning material is structured (Ormrod 2008). For example by creating learning material that focuses on the important concepts presented logically and connected to already established knowledge. In addition, the educator should strive for new plans, structures and teaching and learning situations (ibid). In the words of Ormrod

> "Variety and novelty in the subject matter and the mode of presentation will help keep students´ attention focused on the lesson" (Ormrod 2008: 191)

According to D´Andrea the educator should be preoccupied with the way he/she "structures content of learning activity" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). This can mean the actual sequencing of learning material as well as the actual learning situation. Hence, the educator could chose to structure the class with open discussions as well as time for reading, reflection and writing.

Ormord claims that Gagné argues for the student to be trained with skills in problem-solving strategies by the educator (Ormrod 2008). These should be discovered-oriented and designed at exposing the learner to new learning situations (ibid). In this setting, it is not just the structure and content that is of importance, but equally the actual skills needed to learn. What is more, Piaget advocated the "activity-method" in that the learners should be engaged in activities together in order to learn (ibid). Hence, the claim that Ormrod makes stating that cognitive theories can contain teacher-directed and student-directed teaching methods makes sense (ibid). Some researchers see these as mutually exclusive, but current trends avoid dichotomising, and rather strive for integrated approaches (ibid). As a consequence, a useful method for a teacher from a cognitive perspective could be to focus the teaching on concept and categories, and connect this to previous established knowledge, and as such facilitate the coding process and memory retention.

Furthermore, asking questions, as well as creating a learning environment where the student is able to concentrate is important (ibid). A potential learning situation could then involve different types of strategies were the student and teacher are involved in a dialogue, as well as

working separately on their own. However, last but not least it is important to keep in mind that human learners are only capable of processing a certain amount of information at a time (ibid). Hence, too much information can decrease the value of acquired learning. On the importance of prior knowledge, learning strategies and situations

> "Most recently, cognitivists have suggested that people are most apt to apply what they've learned if their present context encourages retrieval of potentially useful prior knowledge *or* if they've acquired general learning strategies, motives, and dispositions that they bring to bear on virtually any learning task." (Ormrod 2008: 426)

Possible implications for the expectations of quality assurance practices from a cognitive perspective can be the emphasis on the role of the educator making use of already established knowledge. Combined with the focus on structuring the teaching and learning processes, this arguably entails that the structures, or systemic properties, need to cater for already established knowledge. The role of the quality assurance practices can thus be to ensure this. An example with respect to curriculum matters can be targeting information on the sequencing of modules and courses. Quality assurance practices with instruments that have established templates that open for this type of documentation can facilitate this. An additional example can be reports with templates specifying the role of earlier problems, the recording of suggested measures in combination with status on the carrying through on these measures. Furthermore, cognitive theories stress the importance of avoiding information overload. This is particularly relevant for quality assurance instruments as part of the risk with evaluations and assessments are an increasingly large amount of documentation of practices. Hence, it can be claimed that evaluations should be strategic and flexible in their frequency, and not simply follow a set pattern. Periodical evaluations are quality assurance practices that to some extent correspond to this line of reasoning.

In *individual and humanist* theories the educator is according to Glasser preoccupied with involving the learner in the learning process (Halse 1988). Furthermore, creating space for open meetings and social interaction are important elements in creating a good learning environment. As such, the main role for the educator is to create an environment that is open and interactive, potentially by letting the learner feel at ease and be allowed to take initiative. In a classroom setting this can involve discussions between teacher and students on how to structure the class, what content to address, and how they together are to achieve the learning aims they have decided on, individually and as a group. Hence, the individual and humanist

aspects contain two elements simultaneously by the fact that it is the individual that is the centre of attention, but not singularly and separated from the learning environment. On the contrary, part of the development of the whole person involves the society that the learner exists in. According to D´Andrea the humanist theories "facilitates development of the whole person" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). In this it can be interpreted that it is not the only aim to learn something for oneself, but also to learn something of value for society. Furthermore, practices within the individual/humanist aspects involve according to Glasser making agreements between the educator and learner as to what to do and how to behave (Halse 1988). Hence, the educators become involved in attempting to create a learning environment on the individual premises, and take the role as the facilitator, rather than the traditional educator. To sum up the influential theorist Rogers contributed according to Knowles at al. as follows

> "We cannot teach another person directly, we can only facilitate his learning." (Knowles et al. 2005: 46)

If applying individual/humanist learning theories to expectations in quality assurance practices this could mean that the systemic properties or actors involved in the processes can take a step back and act as facilitators of quality processes in teaching and learning, as opposed to a strict directed framework. In addition, the autonomous status of the individual actor entails that a certain amount of freedom will exist in the quality assurance framework. An example is the relative freedom in some participant evaluations as to what type of evaluations to conduct, which are the responsibility of academic staff, e.g. formal questionnaires or informal group meetings with students. Another example is the contracts made between students and the higher education institutions that can be regarded as instruments pertaining to quality issues in higher education. In these examples the role of the actor in quality assurance practices can be more in terms of a facilitator, rather than a director.

In *social situational* theories the educator is, as in the previous section, in a way a facilitator in the sense that he/she should create an environment were groups can learn together, and in dialogue. According to D´Andrea the educator "works to establish communities of practice in which conversation and participation can occur" (D´Andrea 2007: 214). As such, the educator will focus on the relationships between groups and group members, and establish an environment for learning situated in a context. Furthermore, the students and teacher work towards being a team, focusing on information and communication between actors and groups. The teacher can for example work specifically at facilitating the students to improve

the way in which they communicate with each other by offering them problems to solve together that is specifically targeting relevant situations. In addition, according to Vygotskys work, the educator would be addressing cognitive tools such as concepts to facilitate learning, set about conversations about the learning process, establish learning groups, and connect knowledge to real-world practice (Ormrod 2008). However, apart from collaboration with others, challenging tasks and working under different conditions are also important elements for the educator within the social-situational aspect (ibid). As an example, when teaching children about the falling leaves on trees during the fall, a Vygotsky-inspired educator could first talk about different types of trees and leaves in the classroom (introduce the concepts), and then take the children in groups on a field trip to the forest, make the groups identify different types together, and ask them to bring back samples of five different types of leaves that they should present for each other upon the return to the classroom.

Furthermore, as a consequence of modelling (i.e. good examples of practice) the educator must take care to be a model him/herself. As the proverb says, set a good example for the learner: practice what you preach. Using an example from a previous section, this would entail that the dance teacher will be on time, dress according to the same requirements as her dance students and physically practice what she teaches and requires of her dance students in her class. However, it is also important for learners to experience a variety of models, as this is connected to the potential for the learner to improve knowledge and skills (ibid). Hence, the dance teacher could arrange for a field trip to the national ballet so that her students can get a chance at experiencing other models and versions of dance then what she can offer. In addition, work given to the learners must be accomplishable, and the educator should play a decisive role in enabling the learner to set realistic goals. As such, the dance student with a stiff back, and limited turnout in her hips would be encouraged not to strive for a place in the national ballet school as her physical requirements most likely would not make it possible for her to develop sufficiently to become a classical dancer. Finally, enabling the student to take responsibility for his/her actions are also part of the role of the educator (ibid).

> "Self-regulation techniques provide effective methods for improving student behaviour." (Ormrod 2008: 147)

As such one could say that the educator in the case of social situational aspects function like a modern coaching partner, presenting the learner with tools that will enable him/her to become self-sufficient.

The potential expectations of quality assurance practices from the perspective of social/situational theories are multifaceted and rich. However, a few main points can be deducted from the theoretical interpretations in the previous section. First and foremost the emphasis would be on participative instruments that foster dialogue, such as groups, committees, networks and seminars to mention some, and involving all relevant higher education actors (students, academics, leadership, management and administration). Furthermore, the systemic properties would have to contain elements that ensured communication between actors, that information was forwarded to the relevant actors and levels in the system, and as such facilitate a conversational culture. Furthermore, the systemic properties would be designed in such a way as to portray examples of good practices (modelling), be as self-regulated as possible and open to change dynamics. An example of quality assurance practices that can be seen as being compatible with social/situational theories of human learning are evaluation templates that contain strong/weak practices (i.e. modelling) where the evaluation end in a quality seminar representing different groups in the institutional unit(s) (i.e. participatory).

In sum, this chapter has given an outline of some of the important contents in pedagogical perspectives in theories of human learning. Though they are interrelated, some distinct differences are interesting from the perspective of the view on the learning process, purpose in education and educators role. Furthermore, an attempt has been made at discussing the potential implications of the application of learning theories to quality assurance practices and actors, as well as examples of types of practices that can be considered to be compatible with these learning theories. Please see table 3.2 and 3.3 below.

Table 3.2 Summary of content in aspects of learning theories.

Learning theories	*Behaviourist aspect*	*Cognitivist aspect*	*Individual and humanist Aspect*	*Social and situational aspect*
View of the learning process	Behaviour change Mechanical Structural Rational Reinforcement/ punishment Surface transformation Learner: tabula rasa	Cognitive change Memory /Attention Information Mental organisation of experiences Constructive Interactive Relate to prior knowledge Mental representations Experience of meaningfulness	Motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic Individual needs Positive thinking Self actualising Learner in the centre Internalised Curiosity led	Observation Social cognitive Situational and contextual Interaction Modelling Informal and formal interaction Relate to prior knowledge
Purpose in education	Change in behaviour Instrumental Mechanical	Internal transformation Individual Skills and competencies Develop memory	Independent and responsible individual Bildung	Holistic Progressive Participation of actors in groups
Educators role	Situated Control environment to get desired response Predict behaviour Positive environment Reinforcment	Structures material Concepts Activity Skills in problem-solving Connect to prior knowledge Discover-oriented Open discussions Avoid information overload	Learner in the centre of learning Open social interaction See the individual Part of community Facilitate development Make agreements with learners	Facilitator in social cultural context Communities of practice Relationship between groups Information and communication Connect to real-world practice Modelling Set realistic goals Self-regulator

Table 3.3. Summary of aspects of learning theories and potential quality assurance links.

Learning theories *Quality assurance practices*	*Behaviourist aspect*	*Cognitivist aspect*	*Individual and humanist Aspect*	*Social and situational aspect*
View on practices, process and instrument	Rational framework Control Summative Reinforcement Incentives through consequentiality	Structures that internalise process Cognitive awareness of processes Self-evaluation of actors Interactive Tight link between process and actors Dependent on level of meaningfulness Identify weaknesses and strength	Motivation as factor for change System signals affect motivation Open and flexible framework The processes and practices are in the centre of the practices	Interactive practices Context specific Based on internal and external observation Participatory instruments Examples of weak strong practice
Purpose in quality practices	Control and monitor Change through observation Focus on problem areas	Practices directed at internal transformation of actor Develop skills and competence (e.g. type of instruments)	Ensure the autonomy of actors	Full participation of actors Bounded in contextual need Development oriented
Actors role, communication and information	Control the system Cater for local needs Predict responses Declarative knowledge	Cater for already established knowledge Clear structure and division of responsibility Strategic and flexible Declarative and procedural knowledge	Facilitate quality practices Autonomous The actors and processes are in the centre of the practices	Participative Foster dialogue Ensure communication Informal and formal communication

Chapter 4 Methods

> **"Where thoughts come from, whence meaning, remains a mystery. The page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis the right ambience, the right moment, by reading and re-reading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward and your page is printed" (Stake 1995: 148)**

The next chapter will present the strategies and methodology chosen to address the research problem and questions in this study.

4.1. Reflexivity

In this thesis the epistemological and ontological perspectives can be described as pragmatic, and does not venture out into philosophical debates on the theory of knowledge or the nature of reality. The types of research questions asked were not guided by possible methodological implications between positivist and interpretive traditions, but by research interest and considerations of relevance to the research problem. A claim can therefore be made that there is a weakness in the chosen strategy, design and method in that the nature of some of the questions are well established within the positivist/ realist tradition, whilst others are firmly embedded in the interpretive/hermeneutic tradition. The explanation to this dilemma can be found in the fact that this thesis combines two disciplinary dimensions, the knowledge of steering systems and the knowledge of pedagogical theory, and that these are traditionally found to be asking different types of questions. As a consequence there is a duality in the methodological choices made, as well as in the focus and questions that are raised. The thesis is exploratory and attempts at establishing objective facts concerning the structure and content of the quality assurance system, but at the same time the analysis is inevitably a result of an interpretation of the relevant pedagogical theories, historical documents and general findings. Hence, a pragmatic approach emphasizing concrete solutions with respect to the research questions rather than philosophical affiliation is considered to be more appropriate (Patton 2002). In the words of Silverman

> "Theory, then, should be neither a status symbol nor an optional extra in a research study. Without theory, research is impossibly narrow. Without research, theory is mere armchair contemplation." (Silverman 2010: 115)

4.2 Research strategy, design and methods

The research strategy in this thesis is qualitative, within the framework of grounded theory, and the research design is in the form of a case study. Hence, an attempt is made at creating a naturalistic information rich case obtaining in-depth understanding of the research problem through a dialectic process between theory and data collection, and analysis (Cousin 2009, Bryman 2004, Patton 2002). As such, the research process has contained elements of theoretical sampling as an ongoing process of identifying codes/categories/themes, continuous analysis, reaching a saturation level and exploring the relationship between categories (Glasser and Strauss 1967, Cousin 2009). In grounded theory a distinction is made between substantive and formal theory (middle range theories), where the former refers to empirically founded theories and the latter refers to conceptually (more abstract) theories (Bryman 2004). This separation is important to keep in mind during the research discussion as it pertains to the applicability of potential theory generation in the general findings and conclusive part of the research process. Furthermore, the main theoretical and empirical boundaries within the case study of the University of Oslo are the quality assurance practices at faculties and institutes at the level of Bachelor and Master, relevant pedagogical theory, and furthermore after the establishment of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) in 2003 (Cousin 2009).

The aim of this study is to investigate possible connections and not causal relationships. Consequently, it investigates theoretical and empirical discourses that may shed light on the institutional quality assurance system and practices, and implications of the collected data in the potential meeting point between system practices and the actors involved. Therefore content analysis was chosen as a tool to explore and analyze the theoretical and empirical data inductively enabling relevant patterns and/or themes to emerge (Patton 2002). This corresponds to the general analytical strategy.

> "Thus, two central features of grounded theory are that it is concerned with the development of theory out of data *and* the approach is *iterative*, or r*ecursive*, as it is sometimes called, meaning that data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other." (Bryman 2004: 401)

Furthermore, in the continuous effort to focus the content analysis, data collection boundaries were drawn by choosing formal documents such as White papers, national and institutional documents and reports on quality assurance, as well as history books and books on

pedagogical theories as theoretical and empirical sources, rather than conducting a survey or questionnaire. Substantiated by the fact that the research questions concern the primary processes of teaching and learning, this design enables the study to be extended from a macro to a micro level of analysis and simultaneously addressing the systemic and formal aspects of the quality assurance system. Please see table 1.1 for operationalization.

4.2.1 Operationalization of research problem and questions

Table 1.1 operationalization of research questions

To provide background/contextual information: Research Question	**Methods/empirical data sources**
What are the main elements of the Quality Assurance System in the Norwegian Higher Education System?	Content analysis of White papers, national documents and reports on the Norwegian Quality Assurance System from NOKUT, the Ministry of Education and Research and relevant theoretical articles.
Main research questions	**Methods/empirical data sources**
What are the main elements in the quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo?	Content analysis of internal documents from the University of Oslo at the level of central administration, faculty and institute, internal institutional evaluations, reports, and audit conducted by NOKUT, Institutional strategic documents such as "Studiekvalitetsplan". Report from "Fagområdet for undervisnings –pedagogikk" (FUP). The University of Oslo institutional webpage.
Which pedagogical theories and theories on human learning can offer a deeper understanding of these practices?	Content analysis and interpretation of historical documents and books on the Norwegian Higher Education System; the education system and higher education systems in general, and specifically pertaining quality assurance, as well as books and documents on pedagogical theory, history (national and international), and books on psychological theory of human learning from a pedagogical perspective.

4.3. Sampling

The University of Oslo has been purposely chosen as the unit of analysis because it may be considered an important and potentially information rich case (Silverman 2010, Patton 2002).

In addition, the University of Oslo is interesting from the perspective of a potential typical case as it is the largest and oldest university in the Norwegian higher education system. The case study is instrumental in nature and as such can be interesting for other institutions, as opposed to intrinsic (generalize within the single institution) or collective (applicability to institutions in general) (Stake 1995, Stake 2000). However, being an in-depth qualitative study the findings are not generalizable as in reference to quantitative research. Rather, the case of the University of Oslo can serve as an individual example of the potential link between pedagogical theory and internal quality assurance practices, which may have the potential to be relevant for other higher education institutions and the Norwegian higher education system as a whole.

Furthermore, from the perspective of a theory-driven case the University of Oslo was chosen as it contains faculties and departments from all four categories in accordance with the classification of knowledge fields presented by Becher: *hard pure, soft pure, hard applied and soft applied* (Becher 1994, Becher et al. 2002). As an attempt at reaching in-depth knowledge of the research problem, institutes and faculties were purposefully sampled as individual units of analysis through a theory based sampling strategy using Becher`s classification of knowledge fields. Consequently, layering the unit of analysis from institute, faculty to institutional level makes the research design in accordance with theoretical relevance (Patton 2002, Silverman 2010). The data will reflect the differentiated nature of knowledge fields and establish closeness to the core academic processes. This resulted in a relatively diverse sample in terms of knowledge fields by representing four separate faculties at four different institutes at the University of Oslo:

Hard pure The institute of Physics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences	**Hard applied** The institute of Clinical Dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry[1]
Soft pure The institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Art and Ideas at the Faculty of Humanities	**Soft applied** The institute of Teacher Education and School Development at the Faculty of Education.

[1] In this category The Institute of Clinical Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine were approached first, but due to

4.3.1 Trustworthiness and flexibility

In qualitative research using document sources as empirical data, the researcher plays the most vital role in the data collection process (Grønmo 1996). Therefore, in conjunction with general guidelines to the ethical dimension of research as understood by Cousin the researcher constructed a set of rules to strive for based on criteria put forth by Grønmo: closeness, sensitivity and open interaction (ibid, Cousin 2009). The rules are:

- To be open-minded: avoid normative judgments and bias.
- Appreciate the dynamic process of qualitative research when reading empirical data, relevant theory and articles.
- Secure careful consideration and reading of the material and knowledge content.
- Stay diligent towards the research topic and focus.
- Strive for transparency in methodology and analysis.

As such the researcher has during the process of developing the research proposal, strategy, method and design attempted at creating a framework that is relatively objective, in for example the constructing of questions not steered by general opinion, but rather being open and lead by the findings in the data collection process. During the process of gathering documents and relevant literature the researcher has gone back and forth in order to attempt at reaching an in-depth understanding and crosschecking the theoretical relevance to the focus of the study. In addition, the researcher chose not to be too specific when approaching the institutional leadership and student representatives during the data collection process as it could have influenced their response. The researcher has been conscientiously aware of the duality between objective facts and interpretation and consequently attempted to stay focused and avoid wrongful applicability of theoretical and empirical interpretations. Furthermore, by presenting methods and background information the results are open for crosschecking, further dialog and discussion within the focus of study. The researcher holds that these practices are applicable to the overall methods and particularly to the framework of grounded theory, and as such relevant in the context of this study.

4.3.2 Documentary realities

As a consequence of the strategic and methodological choices made in this study, the potential link between quality assurance practices and pedagogical theory at the University of Oslo are seen in the context of documents as institutional, historical and philosophical

products. Even though it is the content of the documents and not the discourse in them that is the focus of this study the following point resides in the background of the analysis:

> "[] it is quite clear that each and every document stands in dual relation to fields of action. Namely, as a receptacle (of instructions, commands, wishes, reports, etc.), as an agent that is open to manipulation by others, and is an ally or resource to be mobilized for further action." (Prior 2004: 91)

Documents can in addition be considered as texts that construct their own reality as well as rhetorical and situational products (Atkinson and Coffey 2004, Silverman 2004). In sum, seeing as parts of the empirical data in this study are documents created in an institutional setting, the findings must be read as what they are: a documentary reality of quality assurance practices in an institution seen in the light of pedagogical theory. Furthermore, clarity in terms of what signifies empirical and conceptual aspects of the data must be strived for in the analysis in order to avoid misrepresentation and misinterpretation of data. As such, a clear distinction between for example a conceptual appreciation of a general higher education system model and an empirical understanding of a specific higher education institution is important.

4.3.3 Data collection techniques

The data collection techniques and consequent criteria were developed as part of a dynamic process of investigating and focusing the research topic. Through content analysis these criteria emerged as relevant patterns and themes in the preliminary investigations. However, this was done with an open mind towards unexpected and new possibilities in the contents of the subject matter, as for example in the case of interesting information revealed due to informal communication with administrative staff during the data collection process.

Historical books, academic literature and system documents were selected using the following criteria

- Research interest/topics (quality assurance and/or pedagogical theory)
- Theoretical relevance
- System relevance
- Emerging patterns/themes

Institutional documents were selected for analysis using the following criteria:

- Considered a formal part of the internal quality assurance system at the University of Oslo.
- Created after the implementation of the Quality Reform, and after a system of internal quality assurance became compulsory in the Norwegian Higher Education System.
- Identified as reports and evaluations of the formal internal quality assurance system.
- Considered part of formal rules and regulations that form part of the internal quality assurance system.

At institutional and faculty level these documents were collected from the University of Oslo quality assurance system websites, as well as external documents available at the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education. However, data at the institute level was not always readily available on the faculty or institute websites, so each of the four institutes/departments were approached via email asking for the opportunity to access relevant documents[2]. In addition, one student academic commission (Fagutvalg) at each institute were approached asking for access to relevant documents, and personal perception of the role played in the quality assurance system. The rationale behind this was the superficial difference in activity conveyed through the information on the university website, and as such a wish to check the potential accuracy and/or applicability of this dissimilarity. Please see appendix II and III for letters.

The availability of data and responses from email approaches were varied, and reminders/ follow-up emails were sent up until four weeks before the final thesis submission deadline. Three of the four institutes responded to the emails representing hard/pure, soft/pure and soft/applied knowledge fields. The hard/pure and soft/applied institutes invited the researcher to come for an informal conversation to further discuss type of documents, whilst the third (soft/ pure) replied very late in the process and did not materialize into any new data. The forth did not respond to any of the emails at the institute level, save a representative from the student academic commission regretting not to have responded within the deadline. Furthermore, there was no response from the resultant follow-up email by the researcher. However, that particular faculty is going through some internal evaluations, and is currently exempt from some of the institutional regulations. Nonetheless, the particularity of this individual unit is not necessarily considered relevant for the trustworthiness of the data collection seeing as there existed material on the internal quality assurance on the website. At

[2] This may be due to the current restructuring and renovation of the university's website.

the same time it is noteworthy to mention that the information available on the institutional website regarding the internal quality assurance system seem to change during the data collection process, which may be attributed to the fact that the university website was under reconstruction. The student academic commissions all eventually responded, two specifically directing the researcher to their website, and two answering the two general questions asked. Only one student representative did not convey any information at all as she was uncertain if any existed.

Due to different types of documentation collected at faculty and institute levels, the data set is not comparable. That is to some extent a weakness in the data collection process, and thesis. However, as the main concern in this study is not to compare, but to create a map of practices and explore their link to pedagogical perspectives the data is still applicable.

4.4 Study limitations

An apparent weakness in this study is that it does not go any further than the formal practices of the institutional quality assurance system, and it would have been interesting to develop the research problem further to include an effect study with more empirical data from the actors involved (students, academics and administrative staff at each institute). The choice to create a pure document analysis of the content was a conscientious one in spite of the realisation of the potential weakness not conducting any interviews or questionnaires entail. It was considered better to focus the study on theoretical perspectives and the formal aspects of the internal quality assurance practices, as the purpose was to create a theoretical discussion on possible links, as well as when the limits on time, resources and scope were taken into consideration.

Furthermore, this study focuses on the link between pedagogical theory and quality assurance practices without much regard for other factors that influence the teaching and learning processes and quality assurance practices. Within the framework of this master thesis, considerations of time and resources meant that difficult decisions concerning scope and focus had to be made in order to create a qualitative, in-depth approach. The actors involved at all levels; be it the institution, the students, the administrators and academics, create a complex web of intangible and tangible interactions. As a response to the complex nature of the dynamics and processes at play in higher education institutions and systems, some aspects that are considered important were left out. However, the research problem, focus and

questions have been selected and based on research and literature on the topic, and can thus be substantiated. What is more, there is in the context of this study a danger of "directing the data to fit the argument", and thus not actually exploring a potential link between internal quality assurance practices and pedagogical perspectives. Consequently, it is important to keep an open mind as to the theoretical distinctions and interpretations made.

The different level of responses and availability of empirical data collected is also a weakness in this study. However, these circumstances potentially indicate quality assurance practices in themselves, and are as such of interest. Furthermore, a claim can be made that the researcher's previous experiences and closeness to the unit of analysis as a current student will shed light on the focus chosen. However, the researcher claims to have taken a step back, and interpreted the theoretical and empirical data being mindful of the content in itself.

Chapter 5 Context:

The Norwegian Quality Assurance System

> **"The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind" (Dewey 1916: 97)**

The Norwegian Higher Education System and its consequent Quality Assurance System are set in a specific context. For some general facts about Norwegian higher education and quality assurance system please see Appendix IV.

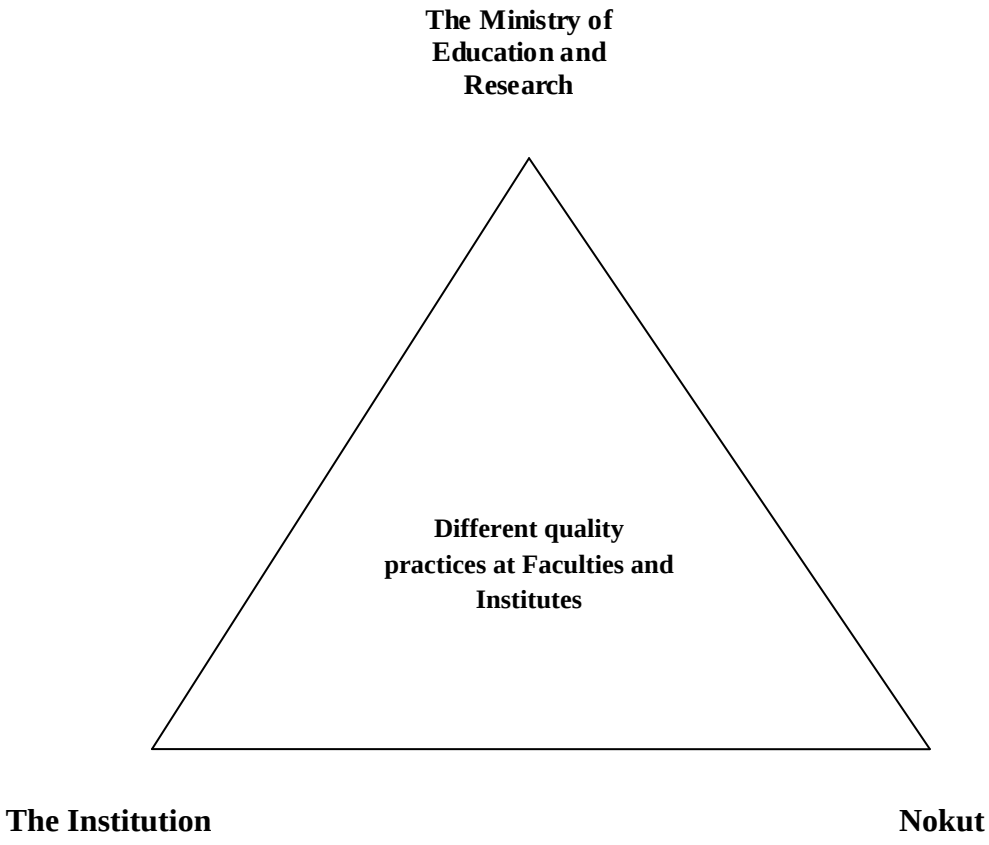
5.1 The structure and role of the actors: Ministry of Education and Research, NOKUT and the higher education institution

> **"System evaluation is regarded as a way of securing quality, efficiency and implementation of political decision"**
> **(On governance of curriculum reform in Norway. Gundem et al. 2003: 526)**

Traditionally, there exists a differentiation between what is considered policies of de-regulation at the state level and self-regulation at the institutional level (Neave 1998). Simultaneously, the rise of the Evaluative State has resulted in the establishment of intermediary bodies considered different from already established committees and agencies (Neave 1998, 2009). Norway is no exception, and after the Quality Reform of 2003 higher education institutions in Norway was required by law to establish internal quality assurance systems, under the monitoring and supervision of a newly established autonomous state agency the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance (NOKUT). As the literature review in chapter two has arguably shown it is important not only to distinguish between different system levels, but equally significant between the actors involved and their relationship. Hence, a model has been created distinguishing and representing the main actors in the Norwegian quality assurance system through an adaptation of Clark` s triangle of coordination (Clark 1983). As Stensaker and Karlsen have shown in their model of internal (institutional) and external (instrumental) quality the dynamics between the system levels are intertwined (Karlsen and Stensaker 1996). Hence, it is also important to include empirical knowledge of these levels and actors to convey the context in which the micro level operates. Thus, the context of the Norwegian system will be addressed in more detail and form part of the empirical foundation in this study.

The Norwegian Higher Education System has three main actors: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance NOKUT, and the higher education institution(s). Furthermore, in the case of this study the higher education institution itself (the University of Oslo), with its faculties and institutes, the main actors are identified as being the students, academics and institutional leadership, management and administration. The model below identifies the main actors in the quality assurance system in the Norwegian Higher Education System.

Model 5.1 The main actors of the Quality Assurance System.



*Excluding independent and informal initiatives from other actors in the higher education system.

"The Act relating to Universities and University Colleges of 2005" created a legal framework where mandates were given by The Ministry of Education and Research to NOKUT and the higher education institutions. The institutions were consequently required by law to

implement an internal quality assurance system within a set framework provided by the Ministry of Education and Research through the mandates given to and operationalized by NOKUT (Stensaker 2006).

> "Universities and university colleges shall have a satisfactory internal system for quality assurance. Student evaluation of courses shall be included in the system of quality assurance" (Section 1-6 of the Act of 2005)

Additionally, the act strengthened the institutional autonomy for higher education institutions. Consequently, the institutions were given the authority to devise and operationalize their internal quality assurance systems. Furthermore, the new legal framework stated the independence and autonomy of NOKUT. However, reports on the implementation of the Quality Reform declare that the official authorities strongly influence the systemic framework, and that the separation of academic and political intentions strived for is less than straightforward when attempted applied in practice (St. meld. nr 7. 2007-2008, Stensaker 2006).

The responsibilities of NOKUT are to execute external quality assurance (accountability, accreditation and audits), whilst internal quality assurance is shared between the institutional authority domain and the operations of the agency. Furthermore, the Board of Governors at NOKUT adopts goals and strategies based on the legal framework (Langfeldt et al. 2007). Important aspects of the goals of 2004 were norms such as to be development-oriented, keep a high international level, create good communication, focus on improving, be innovative and experts in the field (ibid). Arguably, the framework and provisions created by the act of 2005 entails that the Ministry of Education and Research via regulations, procedures and criteria articulated by the intermediary body NOKUT offer a translated version of external and internal quality assurance to the institutional level in terms of the development of institution-specific rules, procedures and criteria. This clearly corresponds with the intertwined nature of internal and external evaluation mechanisms as identified in the model by Karlsen and Stensaker. As such, the criteria provide an external framework for higher education institutions to develop the internal quality assurance system, and within the institutional authority domain to execute the internal quality system. Per se, there are elements of de-regulation at system level and self-regulation at the institutional level via an intermediary agency.

The provisions NOKUT operates under create a quality assurance system comprising of both summative and formative elements. The control aspects, such as monitoring and providing accreditation to institutions and individuals, are instruments that attempts at providing accountability through summative means based on academic judgement. Simultaneously, the act clearly states that NOKUT should assist in the development work that encompasses more improvement and formative oriented instruments (Act relating to Universities and University Colleges of 2005). However, even though the quality assurance system is considered to be functioning well, the enhancement objective has according to a report on NOKUT´s national role only been partly achieved (Langfeldt et al. 2007).

> "The result of the approach adopted by NOKUT is that "control" dominates its approach: the regulatory aspects of NOKUT´s role is emphasised at the expense of the developmental role. In this way, the goal stated by NOKUT that the Norwegian system of quality assurance should be development-oriented has not yet been achieved. Improvement and enhancement of quality follow the control procedures but only as a side effect rather than as a planned enhancement/improvement approach." (Langfeldt et al. 2007: 22)

Furthermore, the independence and autonomy of NOKUT has been questioned as the link between the resources and dependents in the system are considered close, and reports have identified the need for a further strengthening of the agency's autonomy and increasing its flexibility (Stensaker 2006, Langfeldt et al. 2007, St. meld. nr. 7 2007-2008, Høringsnotat 2009). As a result of the evaluation of NOKUT in 2008 amendments to the legal framework were made in order to address some of the weaknesses identified in the system. According to a hearing notepaper (høringsnotat) from 2009 the Ministry of Education and Research stressed the aim of increasing the participation of NOKUT in institutional development work (Høringsnotat 2009). Furthermore, actors stressed that NOKUT should increase its concentration on the quality development taking place within the higher education institutions on educational-, academic- and institutional quality (Langfeldt et al. 2007, Høringsnotat 2009). However, though contributing to the understanding of the elements of the Norwegian Quality Assurance System the recent amendments made in the legal framework and consequent procedures and criteria at NOKUT are not applicable in the context of this study. Thus, the former framework will be presented as relevant background material.

With respect to teaching and learning the role played by NOKUT and the higher education institutions in designing external and internal evaluations are vital. As such, it is the audit dimension of the mandates given by the Ministry that is most relevant in the context of this

study because it pertains to the potential formative aspects of quality assurance in terms of formal evaluations of systemic and individual aspects of the processes within the system. Part of the ministerial regulations concerning quality audits stated:

> "The quality assurance system shall cover all the processes that are important for the quality of a study programme, from information to possible applicants to the completion of the course. Routines for student evaluation of the course, self-evaluation and the institution's follow up of the evaluations, documentation of the institution's work relating to the teaching environment and routines for quality assuring new study programmes must form part of this" (Langfeldt et al. 2007: 12) [3].

Furthermore, NOKUT administers an educational award rewarding institutions for work on student and academic quality (Lycke et al. 2009).

From the ten evaluation criteria for quality assurance systems some explicitly substantiates the focus on teaching and learning in institutional student and academic quality systems. Apart from general criteria on educational quality work by the institutional entities, and foci on assessment and enhancement, articulations such as "ensure wide participation", "make satisfactory assessment of educational quality in all study units", and "the active participation of students in quality work and the institution's focus on the total learning environment" clearly defines the emphasis on a participatory multi-level discourse in the mandates given to the institutions (Langfeldt et al. 2007: 13). Hence the criteria correspond with ministerial steering documents focusing on the active participation of students and academics in the work involving student and academic quality, and show that the systemic properties should be integrated into the institution, as well as the significance attributed to the role of information. However, the report on the national role of NOKUT concluded that these criteria did not attend adequately to the student and academic quality dimension (Langfeldt et al. 2007).

[3] Underlined by author.

5.2 The quality concept, quality instruments and teaching and learning in the Norwegian context.

> **"Quality shall be the overall characteristic of the knowledge-system. We shall put forth demands for quality, in research, teaching and the follow-up of students, and student learning."**
>
> **(St.meld. nr. 27. 2000-2001:8)**
>
> **"In particular the students must be given the opportunity to give systematic feed-back on the quality of the educational content and learning environment"[4] (ibid)**

As has been pointed out by higher education researchers, the quality concept and the expectations of the effect of quality assurance instruments are unquestionably multifaceted and complex. One can wonder whether the concept plays a similar role in the higher education system as the onion does in the play Peer Gynt written by the Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen: the onion has many tasty levels but no kernel/core. As the title of the latest higher education reform in Norway implies (The Quality Reform), the concept of quality plays a significant role in different discourses within the higher education system. The reform was presented in the report "Perform your duty – Demand your rights The Quality Reform of higher education[5]" (Gjør din plikt – Krev din rett Kvalitetsreformen av høyere utdanning) in 2000-2001 (St.meld. nr.7 2007-2008), and the pedagogical perspectives and content in the intentions and the consequent implementation of the reform have not been a straightforward matter. Nonetheless, that which is stressed in policy documents as provisions, intentions and criteria offers an understanding of the mandates held by the main actors and the systemic content of quality in the Norwegian context. A major incentive (or at least a selling-point) behind the Quality Reform was to improve the teaching and learning dimension in higher education institutions through a focus on the student, and consequently achieve an improvement of the effectiveness of the system. According to the report "Status report of the Quality Reform in higher education" issued in 2007-2008 the reform emphasized the success of the student.

> "Through a closer follow-up of students the institutions were supposed to facilitate students to a greater degree to get through their studies as planned and reduce drop-out rates in higher education." [6]
>
> (St. meld. Nr 7 2007-2008: 5)

[4] Author's translation

[5] Authors translation

[6] Authors translation

This statement clearly puts the process of teaching and learning on the agenda, but rather than an effectiveness dilemma it alludes to the efficiency of the process of teaching and learning in order to improve the output (e.g. graduating within the normal timeframe).

However, as the model of actors in the Norwegian Quality Assurance System illustrate there are several aspects to take into account in terms of what the quality concept in the Norwegian context entail. A pertinent question is therefore to ask: quality for whom and what? When considering the main actors in the system the concept entails quality in terms of steering from the perspective of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, NOKUT and higher education institutions. At this level instrumental aspects such as accountability, societal values and norms, and the importance of the knowledge society are prominent. Concurrently, the concept also entails quality at the institutional level from the perspective of the students, academics, institutional leadership and management. As such, there is a division between academic (e.g. research), educational (e.g. academic and student, teaching and learning) and institutional (e.g. institutional governance) quality even though the processes are interrelated. This differentiation is evident from the reports and evaluation documents at system level (Langfeldt et al. 2007, St.meld. nr. 27 2000-2001, St.meld. nr.7 2007-2008, Aamodt and Michelsen 2006, Stensaker 2006). In addition, the documents clearly state that internationalization and societal relevance (e.g. to the work environment) are judged as important quality standards for the higher education system (ibid). What is more, the focus on institutional quality is evident in the strengthening of institutional autonomy and new governance structures with its particular emphasis on strengthening of the institutional leadership and administration as part of the Quality Reform process. Marheim Larsen and Stensaker points to a belief by actors in the reinforcement of institutional leadership and administration as an important quality assurance instrument (Marheim Larsen and Stensaker 2003). As such, the internal quality assurance system can be considered an important mechanism in this respect, and in light of institutional theory one can expect that the improvement of the quality of the processes of teaching and learning present itself with different perspectives dependent on institutional identity, traditions and disciplinary content. Of significance is also the fact that different internal quality assurance systems already existed as a result of previous initiatives and processes (Stensaker 2006). These encompassed a variety of structures, procedures and contents at the institutional level potentially resulting in complimenting and/or duplicating quality processes after the introduction of the Quality

Reform (Stensaker 2006), St. meld. nr. 7 2007-2008). The following aspects are emphasized by the Ministry of Education and Research on institutional quality mechanisms.

> "Routines for student evaluation of teaching and learning, self-evaluation, follow-up of external evaluations, documentation of the work by the institution on the learning environment and routines for quality assurance of new studies should be part of the internal quality assurance system. The student and academic quality work should be strengthened through demands on systemic properties, routines and follow-up"[7] (St. meld. Nr. 7 2007-2008: 22)

Moreover, the somewhat indirect instrument of performance-based funding as a means to ensure quality is an important element complimenting the apparent roles played by the main actors in the Norwegian Quality Assurance System. As part of the general quality reform process, the funding system established in 2002 was created as a mechanism to stimulate and enhance the quality in the higher education system with increased emphasis on educational and research output. (St.meld. nr. 7 2007-2008). The two components based on research and educational output create a stronger focus on the production process within the higher education institution, and potentially affect the different meanings attributed to the concept of quality and quality assurance in the Norwegian system. The educational output component is designed directly to reward the institution in correspondence with student credit accumulation and number of exchange students (ibid). In the context of this study that is interesting as it is potentially linked to the primary processes of teaching and learning, its content and the controversial concept of learning outcomes. Though not a formal part of the quality assurance system as such, the funding system is undoubtedly a steering tool aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education institutions, and with regards to teaching and learning and learning outcomes the indicators used to calculate student output create additional understandings of the contextual meaning of quality. Though some actors regard this shift positively there are some that are critical due to uncertainties regarding the measuring of learning outcomes as standards and indicators of quality, and the increasing focus on what they consider end results rather than process in curriculum matters (Haakstad 2010, Bostad 2009, Bostad et al. 2009). Nevertheless, a claim can be made that though there exists a clear line of authority within the Quality Assurance System and quality enhancement mechanisms the relative openness of the framework may be instrumental in creating a flexible, interactive and participatory environment for quality assurance.

[7] Author's translation

The impact of the internal quality assurance system on teaching and learning is still inconclusive (St.meld nr. 7 2007-2008). However, Stensaker argues that the framework created by the system has potential, but not optimally exploited even though the overall responsibility has been shifted more from the individual actor to the institutional level (Stensaker 2006). Some findings indicate that there is a high level of amendments to the external pressures in terms of formal and central adjustments, but that the symbiosis with internal needs and ambitions has more potential (ibid). As such, there is a risk that the system de-couples rather than create cooperation between institutional actors (ibid). At the same time reports and evaluations of the Quality Reform indicate that the structural changes made to the educational system have impacted teaching and learning in terms of changes in increased group work, written assignments, closer follow-up, and a greater variety in assessments/ exams (Dysthe et al. 2006). The report on pedagogical changes in teaching and learning after the implementation of the quality reform concludes

> "The changes, that had been immediately formalised, were incorporated in the quality assurance systems, and were as such cemented."[8] (Dysthe et al. 2006: 55).

However, an important question is what can be considered to be the result of the quality assurance system in this respect, and which quality practices can be attributed to this effect?

According to the status of the Quality Reform in Higher Education some institutions established "pedagogical development centres" in an attempt to create a link between the quality assurance systems and the educational aspect of the institutional processes (St. Meld. Nr 7 2007-2008). Furthermore, a concern was reported of the limited involvement by students, the need for more resources to develop follow-up plans, and last, but not least the importance of the availability of the documents for the public (ibid). This corresponds well with general literature on quality assurance stressing the role of lines of communication and information for the functionality of the system.

In sum, the main elements in the quality assurance system in Norway consist of the legislative and regulatory framework, and the roles and responsibilities delegated between the main institutional actors in the system. A claim can be made that the quality assurance system is expected to address a wide variety of goals and intentions corresponding to the instruments (accountability, accreditation and audits) and fragmented by the system levels (The Ministry

[8] Author's translation

of Education and Research, the higher education institutions) and actors (bureaucrats, politicians, institutional leadership, students, academics etc). The next chapters will therefore address the research questions as to a potential link between quality assurance practices and pedagogical theory at the institutional level. It is interesting to explore whether theories on human learning the can offer important knowledge that may be relevant to the success/failure of quality assurance systems, and consequently have a potential effect on the teaching and learning environment in higher education institutions.

Chapter 6 Quality assurance practices on teaching and learning at the University of Oslo (UiO)

> **"The quality assurance system at UiO is a comprehensive set of elements that shall ensure and develop the student and academic quality at the university."[9] (UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007: 3)**

As mentioned in chapter five the implementation of the Quality Reform meant that institutional autonomy was strengthened in the Norwegian higher education system; as a result the University of Oslo enjoys a high level of autonomy. Consequently, the institution is responsible for the internal quality assurance system directly influenced by the rules and regulations from the national policy level, as well as internal strategic documents and visions (UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007). As such, the regulatory framework encompasses provisions, mandates, rules and criteria from the Ministry of Education, NOKUT and the University of Oslo, and corresponds to the intertwined aspects of internal and external quality assurance. Based on the analytical framework presented in section 2.2 elements of the quality assurance practises at the University of Oslo will be presented with a particular focus on the processes of teaching and learning. Please see Appendix V for background information.

6.1 The internal quality assurance formal systemic properties at central institutional levels.

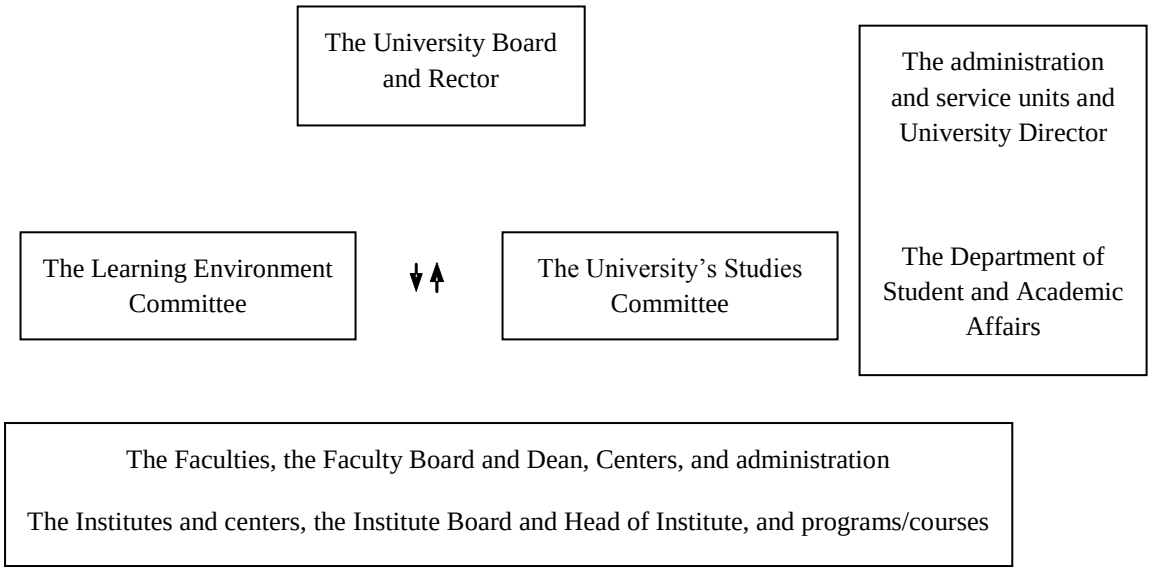
> **"The quality of education is an institutional responsibility with the university board having the overall responsibility. The system shall integrate the work on student and academic quality into the ordinary steering- and leadership structures and shall, as much as possible, build on existing routines, arrangements and organisational units."[10]**
> **(UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007: 5)**

The internal quality assurance system is such that it incorporates the formal and systemic properties of quality of teaching and learning at all levels in institutional structure through a focus on student and academic quality. Please see table 6.1.

[9] Authors translation

[10] Authors translation where student and academic quality encompass the primary processes of teaching and learning

Table 6.1. A graphic representation of the structure and actors of the internal quality assurance system at UiO.



The main framework consists of provisions on studies and exams (Forskrift om studier og eksamener ved Universitetet i Oslo, 2006), mandates of The University´s Studies Committee (Universitetets studiekomité), and rules for faculties and institutes in addition to administrative regulations at each faculty (UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007). The provisions on studies and exams show that the faculties have a high level of autonomy in matters of student and academic quality, be it through procedures to establish/abolish study programmes or the development of program/course plans and descriptions (Forskrift om studier og eksamener ved Universitetet i Oslo 2006). However, certain elements, as for example criteria on the contents of degrees and credits, the length of the academic year and examination types are set by the central institutional authority (ibid). Furthermore, the institution is responsible for the integration of the system to steering- and management structures at every institutional level (ibid). According to an evaluation report the internal quality assurance system on student and academic quality corresponds with national criteria, and formally reinforces the roles of the actors (Askling et al. 2008).

> "In addition, it is of the opinion of the committee that the division of roles within the system serves its purpose and is clearly defined."[11] (Askling et al. 2008:10)

[11] Authors translation

Below are tables summarizing the main element that make up the systemic properties of the student and academic quality assurance system at the University of Oslo, presented according to the analytical tool developed in chapter 2.2. The first table summarizes the main elements of the macro level of the institution.

Table 6.2 Main elements of the internal quality assurance systemic properties at the macro level of the institution.

The internal quality assurance systemic properties	***University of Oslo at the level of central institutional leadership and management*** ***Student and Academic Quality***
Processes, practices and instruments	• Annual plans, reports and evaluations: description, assessments and planned measures through the process of defining goals, planning measures, implementing and evaluating measures, analysis/assessment of goal achievement, feedback. • Identify weaknesses and strengths in the system and its practices. • The University Board annually presents an award to an institutional unit/group for the accomplishment of high-quality pedagogical and academic standards in the learning environment "UiOs pris for godt læringsmiljø". • The Department of Student and Academic Affairs conducts a Student and Academic Survey. • Documentation: qualitative and quantitative. • Follow-up procedures. • Participative: relevant actors are represented in boards and institutional units. • Investigating institutional documents show that the institutional student and academic quality plans and documents are increasingly linked to the institutional strategic plans.
The purpose of practices	• Monitoring and control. • Improve and develop. • Identify strengths/ and weaknesses. • Engage the institutional leadership. • Assure student and academic quality. • Balance between control and development.
The role of actors, communication and information	• Decentralized authority and responsibility anchored in leadership structures. • Representation of all relevant actors in institutional units. • Active participation of main actors. • Formal lines of communication through the hierarchical leadership structures in multiple directions vertically as well as horizontally

	in the internal quality system. E.g. annual steering dialogue meetings with faculty leadership. • Data collection within a relative open and flexible framework of quality assurance templates. • Reports and evaluations based on documentation derived from the lower levels of the institution. • Cooperation with "Fagområdet for universitetspedagogikk" (a group specifically working with student and academic quality from a pedagogical perspective. • Pedagogical competence is required for teaching staff, and courses (e.g. problem-based learning, academic supervision, the learner and the learning environment). Offered at the "Fagområdet for Universitetspedagogikk". • The University Board monitors the overall internal quality system. • The Learning Environment committee makes suggestions with focus on follow-up of results. • The University´s Studies Committee is an advisory unit to the Board. • The Department of Student and Academic Affairs: register, analyze and document information.

(UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007, UiO Studiekvalitetsplaner 2005-2009, UiO Årlige rapporter 2005-2006, UiO webpage 23.06.2010, 07.09.2010, 02.11.2010).

The next table makes a representation of the elements at the level of faculty according to the analytical tool in chapter 2.2.

Table 6.3 The internal quality assurance systemic properties at the level of faculty.

The internal quality assurance systemic properties	***At the level of faculty*** ***Student and Academic Quality***
Processes, practices and instruments	• Decentralized authority and responsibility. • Annual reports, plans, evaluations and assessment of measures, e.g. aim achievement and follow-up. General framework: (Please see Appendix VI for general joint framework outline) • *Joint framework for quality assurance of programmes of study:* assessment of course evaluations, quantitative student input data, content on programmes of study, courses, assessment practices, and learning environment. Frequency: annual and periodical

	(internal and external). Based on information from reports on courses, annual reports and external programme supervisor report. • *Joint framework for quality assurance for course:* midterm and periodical evaluations of study. E.g. participant evaluations: student evaluations and self-evaluations by academic staff. Content: information on commencement of course, course content, teaching methods and plans, and the learning environment. Conducted in cooperation with the students. The periodic evaluations: course details, the assessment practices, student evaluations and student effort. The academic staff makes a self-evaluation based on data from student results, as well as own efforts. The person responsible for the course writes a report which should contain the following: participant's assessment, academic results, aims, focus group, teaching and assessment techniques, resources and accomplished improvements and measures. • External programme of study evaluation entail looking at coherence and sequencing, actors assessment, learning aims, accomplishments and outcomes, types of teaching and assessment method, as well as accomplishments, measures and suggestions for improvements. • Annual reports contain quantitative outcome data, external supervisor reports, periodical evaluation reports, summary of work, weaknesses and strengths, and institutional responses based on documentation created at the level of institute and programmes of study. • Includes participant evaluations, seminars, steering dialogue meeting. Informal and formal arenas. • Course and programmes of study descriptions. • Personal study plan: important two-way instrument.
The purpose of practices	• Monitor and control • Improve and develop • Assure student and academic quality • According to capacity and need at appropriate system levels (faculty, programme of study, institute or course).
The role of actors, communication and information	• "Kvalitetsnettverket" (The Quality Network) consists of representatives from faculties. An intermediary unit. • Faculty leadership has the overall responsibility: aims, priorities, assessments, approving systemic properties and plans, devising annual report. • Leadership and management, administration/technical staff, academic staff and students represented in faculty leadership structures. • Programme of study leadership/management responsible for academic content, pedagogical accommodation and

	administration. Annual evaluations and reports. • Formal lines of communication in multiple directions vertically as well as horizontally in the quality system, and according to hierarchical levels. • Dialogue and facilitator roles between affected actors. • Institute leadership/management: responsible for plans and strategic work, decisions on teaching and learning processes and quality systemic properties. Annual report. • The academic staff and students: e.g. participant evaluations. • External programme of study supervisors: monitor assessment practices, assess and suggest improvements • Informal and formal lines of communication between actors. • Oral and written documentation of practices, e.g. Quality System Network discussions, seminars and feedback on quality system templates • Cooperation between institutional levels. E.g. External programme supervisor communicates with institute and faculty level. • Student commissions and representatives • Discourse between quantitative and qualitative data. • Quantitative data: e.g. student/academic staff ratio as an indicator of teaching and learning quality, • Qualitative data: e.g. clarifying the academic content of programmes of study potentially leading to curriculum changes.

(UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007, Askling et al. 2008, UiO Studiekvalitetsplaner og rapporter 2005-2009/10, Kvalitetsnettverket 12.09.2009, UiO Årlig kvalitetsrapport 2004-2005, UiO webpage 23.06.2010, 07.09.2010, 02.11.2010).

6.2 Interpreting the data: the quality processes, practices and instruments, purpose, and role of actors, information and communication.

> **"Main goal: To establish a quality system at UiO that fulfils its aim of a systematic, methodological and holistic approach to the work with student and academic quality, quality development and quality assurance".[12]**
> **(UiO Studiekvalitetsplan 2005:1)**

Six quality aspects were developed and introduced in the institutional Student and Academic quality plans and reports, which serve as indicators of the understanding of academic and student quality at the University of Oslo. The six quality aspects are, and pertain to some of the following attributes:

1. *Entrance quality* – student prior knowledge and competence.

[12] Authors translation

2. *Quality of material and immaterial resources* - learning environment, human resources, physical facilities and factors contributing to a good learning environment.

3.*Programme quality* – programmes of study planning and organization of learning, course description and plan for programmes of study.

4.*Teaching quality* - academic staff facilitating the teaching and learning process as to enhance student-learning outcome.

5. *Result quality* -student development and outcome results, including societal relevance for the work market.

6. *Management quality* - institutional ability to steer its quality assurance and development. (Adapted and translated from UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007)

The quality aspects are not mutually exclusive, and all encompass a link to the teaching and learning processes at the University of Oslo.

> " [ ]includes all the processes of relevance to the student and academic quality where the quality system is meant to be an assessment and develop instrument [ ][13] "
>
> (UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007:3)

However, some are more directly coupled to the processes than others. For example, entrance quality does not influence the teaching and learning process other than as an indicator of the academic competence of incoming students, and the potential impact that social events have on the learning environment. On the other hand, the immaterial and programme aspect of quality can be more directly linked to the teaching and learning processes as they particularly target the human resources capacities and academic field being taught. Furthermore, the teaching quality aspect is directly coupled with teaching and learning processes. On faculty understanding of the aspect of teaching quality:

> " Many regard this as the core itself in the concept of student and academic quality, and the faculty reports imply that it is an aspects that is addressed continually and well"
>
> (UiO Studiekvalitetsrapport 2009: 11)

In addition, the result and management quality aspects are indirectly coupled to the teaching

[13] Authors translation

and learning processes as they are indicators of practice, and contain elements that potentially steer the processes in the desired direction. However, as the internal quality assurance system operates on many levels, this is not a straightforward process, and as have been alluded to in previous chapter, identifying the causality in the dynamic institutional processes are difficult, if not to some extent impossible.

The University of Oslo can serve as an example of a way to address the complexity of system processes by linking them to the core activities and leadership structures. The different evaluation instruments, reports, plans and measures to follow-up encompass a dynamic system that targets the core activities and actors. For example, the personal study plan of the student is regarded as an important two-way instrument to ensure graduation and student output within the normal timeframe, and as such be an instrument to cater for the purpose of following up the student. (UiO Studiekvalitetsplan 2008). Moreover, student evaluations are considered instruments that can enhance the understanding of how students learn, and as such facilitate the increasing focus on teaching and learning as a means to improve learning outcome (UiO Studiekvalitetsplan 2007).

According to the main institutional quality document the following illustrates the purposes behind the quality practices.

> " - to contribute to goal accomplishment of educational aspects of the institution and the learning environment,
>
> - to discover weaknesses and recognize strengths in teaching and learning and education,
>
> - to be an instrument for systematic work on quality assurance and –development." [14]
>
> (UiO Kvalitetssystem for utdanningsvirksomheten 2007: 3)

Furthermore, the student and academic quality aspects are illustrative of the purposes in the criteria and processes connected to them: the contents in the documentation, assessments, evaluations, reports, aim-achievement and follow-up indicate which focus on teaching and learning is taken by the actors at the different levels of the system. Particularly at the micro level of the institution where practices concerning evaluations and reports conducted of courses and programmes of study, such as student evaluations, are at the centre of potential accumulation of valuable information.

[14] Authors translation

According to the report by Askling et al. the administration and leadership levels have good knowledge/ conscientiousness and ownership of the internal quality assurance system (Askling et al. 2008). Furthermore, as a consequence of academics staff and students being represented in committees, commissions and networks at all system levels with executive- and advisory authority a claim can be made that the quality system contains participative steering mechanisms, and that this structure ensures a certain amount of awareness at least for the actors directly involved. However, it is suggested that the overall awareness of the actors in the system decreases proportionally with the institutional hierarchical levels, and that it is important for the micro-level actors to secure and experience rewards for their efforts (ibid). This is significant as it pertains directly to teaching and learning, and consequently student and academic quality being not only documented but also followed up. However, reports show that student bodies such as the academic and program commissions (Fag- og Program-utvalg) play a significant role in the discussions and results of evaluations, as well as informal meetings between student representatives and the university leadership (UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten, UiO webpage 23.06.2010, Askling et al.). Hence, awareness can be seen to not only depend on the hierarchical levels, but potentially also be site-specific. As portrayed at the university webpage, local variations at the faculty level concerning responsibilities and roles due to site specific- priorities and structures are expected and a result of the decentralized structure and relative autonomy of organizational units (UiO webpage 23.06.2010).

The actors most closely coupled to the processes of teaching and learning are the academic staff and students. The academic staff is involved in the quality process as teachers, colleagues, planners, representatives and leaders in the institution. Furthermore, they perform core practices as the person responsible for courses, and the lecturer him/herself has the overall responsibility for assuring and developing the quality of the course. However, the role of the students has a less strict framework in the sense that they are *encouraged to participate* in student evaluations, make use of class-and student representatives, and take an active role in student and academic quality issues (UiO Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten 2007). What is more, incentives for participation for students as well as academic staff is varied, and as such the student involvement differ across courses, programmes of study, institutes and faculties (Askling et al. 2008).

Hence, aims combined with the various instruments and processes that are present in table 6.2 and 6.3 show that the internal quality system contains formative as well as summative elements. This is of importance as it is through plans for measures, response and monitoring that the formative (development-oriented) dimension can be coupled with the summative (decision-oriented). Furthermore, as higher education literature has shown, if these dimensions and instruments are loosely coupled the result could be that the information collected is not optimally utilized. Consequently, based on the systemic properties and role of actors, a claim can be made that attempts are being made at tight coupling of elements in the quality assurance system by involving and delegating authority from the macro to the micro level containing aspects to monitor (control) and improve (develop) the student and academic quality and the teaching and learning processes. This interpretation is corroborated by some of the assessments in the evaluation and report on the system conducted by NOKUT (Askling et al. 2008).

To achieve tight coupling of the formative and summative aspects in the internal quality system the information and communication on documentation between actors and system levels are vital. The leadership, management and administration at all levels have been given the overall responsibility and arguably are meant to ensure that information is collected and made available for relevant actors. However, according to a report the practices of the internal quality assurance system lack documentation on aim-achievements and follow-up (Alsking et al. 2008). Furthermore, the report states that some faculties are concerned that the increasing pressures to evaluate may lead to an evaluation saturation point where the institution does not have the capacity to follow-up. It continues:

> "Considering that several student groups expressed an increasing exhaustion towards evaluations there are grounds to advice the institution to be extra attentive to this point. However, it is the impression of the committee that the institution is aware of this problem and that it has its evaluation practices assessed regularly. As such, it is of the opinion of the committee that improved feedback routines on evaluations will serve to counter the evaluation exhaustion. "[15] (Askling et al. 2008:14)

To address these issues are vital as it could otherwise lead to an unwillingness of relevant actors such as the students and academic staff to participate in evaluation processes, and hence have an impact on the student and academic quality practices of teaching and learning processes.

[15] Authors translation

First and foremost the student and academic quality plans serves as reference points in aim-achievement and work on development (UiO Studiekvalitetsplan 2008). What is more, reports offer opportunities to present strong/weak practices in teaching and learning, and as such create a learning opportunity for relevant actors. However, according to Askling et al. this connection is not necessarily achieved. The reports state that even though aim-achievement and follow-up are found in institutional quality plans, the aspects are not sufficiently covered in reports (Askling et al. 2008). For example, the report found that student complaints had not been included in the annual institutional reports, and a recommendation was made that these be included (ibid). A claim can be made that the coupling of aims to actual achievement requires a tight link to the practices, and that this is accomplishable if the documentation actually targets the processes of teaching and learning. Furthermore, for this documentation to be of use, the results must be made known and available to all actors. Several institutional documents show that the internet is seen as an important management tool in this regard.

> "Systematically publish / make known evaluation results on the internet, in order that students receive information concerning results of evaluations they have participated in, and information of the quality at every study field offered" (On management quality in UiO Studiekvalitetsplan 2008: 2)[16]

Hence, information and communication is an important element for the quality practices in several respects. First, in terms of what type of information the systemic properties manage to collect (e.g. student output results or types of learning styles), secondly the way in which the information is communicated (formally and/or informally), and third potentially the way in which it is utilized. In the literature review possible factors influencing institutional behaviour were presented, such as for example tradition effecting institutional responses. In an institutional setting as the University of Oslo (rich on traditions and the oldest higher education institution in Norway) it is tempting to claim that tradition and already established habits do influence the response from the affected actors. What is more, as the table offered by Massy gives a graphic representation of, potential feedback loops tightly coupled to the assuring of the quality of teaching and learning are of consequence. As such, though the quality system properties contain formal lines of communication at the University of Oslo, the way in which these lines are loosely and/or tightly coupled to the responsible actors and processes will impact its scope and effect.

[16] Authors translation

> "All in all sufficient information is produced by the quality system in order to assess the overall quality at every level, but it is demanding to convey the right information up- and down the levels of the organisation. Hence, the challenge is to make the quality work aim-specific: develop broad measures in areas that are already functioning well."[17] (UiO Studiekvalitetsrapport 2009: 16)

6.3 The internal quality system practices on teaching and learning at four different institutes and faculties

> **"The system encompasses all processes of relevance for educational quality, from information to possible applicants until graduation"[18]**
> **(Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten ved UiO 2007:3)**

In this section the formal quality system practices on teaching and learning is explored at the *The Institute of Physics* (Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences), *The Institute of Oral Biology* (Faculty of Dentistry)[19], *The Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Art and Ideas* (Faculty of Humanities) and *The Institute of Teacher Education and School Development* (Faculty of Education), and as such represents four different knowledge fields (hard/pure, hard/applied, soft/pure and soft/applied) within the University of Oslo.

Based on the documentation and analysis in the previous sections the main elements of the internal quality assurance system at the university (practices, processes, instrument, purposes, role of actors, communication and information) will be investigated with respect to quality aspect that are relevant for the processes of teaching and learning. The four sampled faculties have a joint structure in an elected and appointed management, implying representation of academic and professionalized leadership and management. Furthermore, derived from the differentiated nature of the four classified knowledge fields, decentralised steering system, and the role of tradition affecting institutional behaviour, variations of practices can be expected between the institutional units.

Furthermore, important themes regarding the student and academic quality aspects guiding the sampling of data concern all six institutional quality aspects, but with an emphasis on the

[17] Authors translation
[18] Authors translation
[19] As mentioned in chapter one the available and collected data in this section is limited, especially at the level of institute. Furthermore, quality work on material resources is extensive, new facilities are planned and expected, and consequently potentially take up time and resources in the internal quality system.

human resources dimension (e.g. the actors involved), processes, situations and systemic properties relevant for teaching and learning processes.

6.3.1 The institute of Physics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (MN)

Table 6.4 The main elements of the quality assurance practices: hard/pure knowledge field

Quality assurance practices	***Main elements at The institute of Physics at The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences***
Practices, process and instruments	• Student and Academic Plan, annual reports at the level of faculty, evaluations. • Annual and periodical programmes of study evaluations and consequent reports • Periodical and midterm course evaluations: student evaluations, assessment of academic staff and feedback from external programme supervisor and consequent reports. • Course descriptions • Steering dialogue meetings (e.g. good/weak practice) • Faculty seminar on learning outcomes • Student Commission on Academic Matters at the Institute of Physics (Fysisk Fagutvalg) offers student evaluations and feedback practices through "The lightening evaluation" and student course evaluations conducted by the students 2003-2009. • Faculty document describing who, when and were of the quality system practices.
The purpose of practices	• Contribute to good learning environment • Good steering instrument • Enhance pedagogical competence of academic staff • Enhance awareness of good learning environment through knowledge from student evaluations • Secure development of curriculum • Be standardized, clear and coupled with educational aims.
Role of actors, communication and information	• Decentralized, and faculty and institute leadership, management and administration have the overall responsibility. • The actual execution of practices closely linked to the responsible parties, e.g. Head of programme of study and institute are responsible for informing students and academic staff on the quality system practices relevant to them. • Academic staff and students are responsible for quality processes pertaining to teaching and learning, e.g. participant evaluations and self-evaluations. • Formal and informal lines of communication (oral and in writing) horizontally and vertically. • Quantitative and fact-oriented information (e.g. quantitative output

	results, fact descriptions: student/staff ratio, credit accumulation, grade distribution and student output results). • Qualitative information (e.g. examples of weak practice and potential measures) less distinct. • Student Commission on Academic Matters at the Institute of Physics is an active participant in student evaluations: e.g. information includes issues related to lectures, academic material, teaching methods, course work assessment and the like, all of which is available and published at their website. • Plans, evaluations, reports should be available in the internet. Hence, the institutional web pages on quality assurance are considered important venues for information and communication.

(MN System for kvalitetssikring 2005/2007, MN Studiekvalitetsplan 2007, MN Årlige Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2007-2009, MN Årshjul 2006/2010, MN Tilssysnsensor 2010, UiO webpages 22.09.2010)

At the Institute of Physics documents show that the faculty guidelines are followed in terms of responsible actors (UiO webpage 22.09.2010). As such the practices are very much steered by the documents produced in the system. With regards to evaluations on programmes of study at the Institute of Physics there were some differences as to what was conveyed in the document content. For example in the report of a bachelor programme, curriculum development (e.g. need for the strengthening of academic coherence and belonging) was mentioned. At the master level one example showed that students continually evaluate all courses, one emphasised output data (e.g. how many graduated, were on leave, grade distribution and the like), and the other reported on the level of participation in student evaluations being low (Årlig rapporter/evaluering av studieprogram, bachelor og master nivå 2005/2006) As such, the reports show that they operate with different quality aspects, some more with programme, others teaching, and others result aspects of quality. This corresponds with general aims in the system that the systemic properties should cater to site-specific/local needs and relevance (e.g. teaching quality could be more relevant at bachelor than master level dependent on programme composition). Hence, it is not only the actual student and academic processes that potentially influence the practices, but also the composition of knowledge fields represented at the institute.

Moreover, reports show instruments that are both fact-oriented (e.g. quantitative output result) and development oriented (e.g. periodical programmes of study evaluations listing examples of weak practice and potential measures). Thus, the reporting contains both summative and formative practices. However, though the data from The Student Commission on Academic Matters at the Institute of Physics show that students at the institute are actively

involved participants in the quality work on teaching and learning, learning environment and academic staff pedagogical development, the coupling between the teaching and learning processes entails that the academic staff make use of the information in order for it to have a formative effect. In a sense, the summative aspects of the quality assurance practices are comparable to the institutional thermostat mentioned in the literature review, and will consequently result in formative measures being taken if reaching a high temperature. As such, reports and facts are connected to possible measures, and the system therefore has elements of summative and formative instruments. However, the overall impression from the data collected is that there is a stronger focus on facts rather than descriptions of aim-achievement and measures on issues pertaining specifically to teaching and learning, and that the focus decreases proportionally according to structural levels at the faculty/institute. A possible reason for this is that the information and communication at this level is informal and oral, and as such under-documented.

6.3.2 The Institute of Clinical Dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry (OD)

Table 6.5 The main elements of the quality assurance practices: hard/applied knowledge field

Quality assurance practices	***Main elements at The Institute of Clinical Dentistry at The Faculty of Dentistry***
Practices, process and instruments	• Anchored in leadership/management/administration structures. • Annual reports and plans on Student and Academic Quality. • The quality aspects are identified and linked to instruments at the level of faculty. • Teaching and programme: e.g. student- and teacher evaluations, progression evaluation on students' work, feedback from external supervisor and teaching and learning award to academic field. • Quality of material and immaterial resources: e.g. student/staff ratio, student credit accumulation and student output. • Study-information: e.g. issues concerning information and internet, and former student evaluations. • Evaluation and assessment: e.g. feedback on evaluations and measures if high level of failure. • Instruments at the institute correspond with the general framework of UiO, • Plans and reports are considered complimentary instruments. • Continual work on academic content based on best/worst practice. • A comprehensive set of student evaluations are available at the faculty website from 2003-2006, but a change of practice in 2006 resulting in only periodical evaluations of courses. Examples of

	information: integration of the academic fields, teaching methods, overlap of subjects and information on the internet. • Internet based applications such as Questback. • High degree formalised and standardised processes and instruments.
The purpose of practices	• Monitoring, suggest measures, follow-up. • Have local relevance, and concern elements it is possible to address. • Be measurable. • Flexible and open to further development. • An ongoing process of evaluation on the content and quality of the teaching.
Role of actors, communication and information	• Role of actor coupled with local relevance, e.g. the Head of programmes of study/ the dean of study are responsible for implementing improvement measures as a result of evaluations and reports. • Commission on programmes of study: monitoring programmes of study, contact external programme supervisor. • Commissions on semesters: monitor and perform quality work on courses. • The documentation reported in the quality practices is through written and oral practices: e.g. observation from external supervisor. • Quantitative data and descriptive facts seem the predominant content in reports: e.g. the quality system description contains a "Toolbox" with procedures that can be applied to practices. • Limited information on teaching and learning processes pertaining to formative aspects specifically on the teaching quality aspects. • Some formative measures concerning the programme quality aspect, e.g. curriculum development, but limited. • The student evaluations are internet-based, and the results are sent to the heads of the academic field and clinics, and addressed by the Commissions on semesters and programmes of study. • Actors such as academic staff and students involved through general representativeness in institutional units, and course evaluations.

(UiO webpages 22.09.2010, OD Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2007-2009, OD tilsynsrapporter 2005/2006, OD Strategisk plan 2005-2009)

The Institute of Clinical Dentistry is divided into clinics (practical) and academic (theoretical) units, and the academic staff and student are involved directly with the work on quality. From the perspective of the faculty, the students are considered to be well-integrated in the quality system, and communication of results from quality work and processes is straightforward.

> "The results are made public on the internet or by direct communication between employees, students and other relevant actors"[20] (OD Studiekvalitetsrapport 2008:7)

However, the faculty level expressed a wish for increasing the involvement of the academic staff, as well as creating an instrument aimed at systematic feedback routines (OD Studiekvalitetsrapport 2008). Furthermore, there is no indication of active involvement from student commissions apart from the general representativeness in the faculty structures. Nonetheless, according to a faculty plan the students are involved in the quality assurance processes at the institutes, and the role of students is further strengthened.

> " The faculty has worked actively at the institutional level to improve the learning environment. The cases that arise are solved at the lowest possible level. A contact-commission has been established with representatives from the student body"[21] (OD Studiekvalitetsrapport 2009: 2)

In combination these reported documentations can be seen to exemplify the emphasis on site-specificity in the quality assurance practices and purpose at the faculty.

The interpretation made in this section can be attributed to the limited data collected and available at the level of institute, combined with the type of information conveyed in the faculty reports, and thus must be read as such. However, one example of a different type of practice is a student and academic quality seminar focusing on learning outcomes and different types of learning styles (OD Studiekvalitetsrapport 2007). Furthermore, the lack of more specific information on aim-achievement in combination with follow-up measures on teaching and learning processes can be due to the emphasis in the systemic properties to be more summative rather than formative. This can be attributed to the fact that though lines of communication exist in the quality system structure, the instruments and responses are tightly coupled to the activities being assessed, and as such locally anchored as the systemic properties suggest. Though the closeness of problem identifying and response is efficient, the potential weakness in reporting instruments in terms of multiple feedback loops could lead to decreased learning opportunities for other organizational actors, units and levels.

> "The faculty will in 2010 go through evaluation procedures addressing frequency, content and type of feedback. In addition we see a concrete need to carry out systematic feedback on follow-up measures" [22](OD Studiekvalitetsrapport 2009: 8)

[20] Authors translation
[21] Authors translation
[22] Authors translation

As previous empirical and theoretical data have shown, from a formal system perspective an important part of achieving this is to connect the plan to institutional responses, and the aspect of result and management quality so as to assure that the plan becomes a performing quality instrument.

6.3.3 The Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Art and Ideas[23] at the Faculty of Humanities (HF)

Table 6.6 The main elements of the quality assurance practices: soft/pure knowledge field

Quality assurance practices	***Main elements at The institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Art and Ideas at The Faculty of Humanities***
Practices, process and instruments	• Anchored in leadership/management/administration structures: a mini UiO. • Decentralized responsibility and authority to ensure participation • Annual plans, evaluations and reports on Student and Academic Quality: e.g. the aspect of programme and teaching quality is documented in the reports with respect to curriculum changes creating a link between the sequencing and content of courses and academic subject groups, to work on learning outcome, as well as revising teaching and assessment norms. • Adhere to the systemic properties of the UiO quality system. • Arrange seminars on teaching and learning for academic staff • Develop templates, e.g. create external supervisor template • Establish new forms of evaluations of teaching and learning in order to increase the utility function and clarify learning outcome of course • Local adaptations made to the system. For example, in the frequency of periodical course evaluation the large amount of courses offered at the faculty has lead to a reduction in reporting required, and has been allocated according to academic subject group. Furthermore, for the external programme supervisor it is specifically stated they shall play a role in monitoring the teaching, not only the assessment practices of teaching and learning • Strengthening of the relationship between lecturer and group teacher. • Provide teaching courses for academic staff. • Part of the overall strategic plans of the institute. • Types of evaluations reported at IFFIK are mid-term evaluations, periodical evaluations, external sensor reports, and student and participant evaluations Dialogue between actors: e.g. academic staff, students and course coordinator.

[23] IFFIK is a newly established institute

	• Incentive-driven instruments: e.g. motivate staff to obtain the required pedagogical competence by financially punishing the organisational unit per staff member if the requirements are not met. • The development of documentation and points of reference in annual plans and reports is meant to facilitate improvement of student and academic quality: e.g. create links to teaching and learning processes by designing new and stable templates for reporting on course and programmes of study. • The timeline and frequency of reporting and evaluation is explicitly linked to the possibility for actors to respond.
The purpose of practices	• Build on already existing units and functions. • Work on curriculum development. • Develop human resources capacity in teaching and learning: e.g. dialogue- and problem-based methods, seminar activity for relevant staff and incentives to promote good teaching and supervision. • Support academic activities initiated by students • A high level of quality on teaching and learning processes • Focus on cooperation between the teaching academic staff, the administration and student feedback at the institute level (IFFIK). • Develop web-based information and procedures to student and academic administration, and students (IFIKK). • Quality system properties should adopt local variations: e.g. the reporting that the periodical programmes of study evaluation are considered too frequent, and that the faculty wishes to use it more strategically
Role of actors, communication and information	• Representation and responsibility of actors are structured horizontally as well as vertically, but with decisive authority distributed to the leadership, and management and administrative units. • The institutes, external programme supervisor processes, the Committee for programmes of study and- administration • At the Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Art and Ideas (IFIKK) the actors directly involved with the system are the administrative units, academic field coordinator and head of teaching and learning, academic staff and students. Hence, participation of all relevant actors: e.g. person responsible for courses, is responsible for carrying out course evaluations. • Student Commission of academic matters in philosophy works by voicing their opinions, making suggestions and producing an independent hearing note. • Documentation at the faculty level is balanced in terms of quantitative and qualitative data: e.g. facts are established through numbers as well as descriptions, and the description provides content relevant for the quality of teaching and learning processes. • The internet is considered a means to make information available to actors, and as such communicate findings, e.g.

	• Communicating and information between staff is a priority for the institute, and, examples reported reveal that the system is geared formal and informal lines of communication • Pragmatic approach e.g. it is reported that some of the participant evaluations have been done orally with the students themselves. • Incentive-based instrument directly affecting actors and example of follow-up procedures: as a consequence of students reporting a lack of mid-term evaluations in some courses, and acting on the advice from NOKUT, it was decided that the person responsible and as such paid to do this would be potentially punished financially through removing that element from that person's work-duty description. This instrument was implemented for mid-term and periodical evaluations in 2008. • Quantitative and qualitative data, but strong emphasis on formative aspects: e.g. examples of the pedagogical competence of the academic staff involved with teaching and learning enhanced by obligatory courses or self-development measures. • Oral as well as written measures of quality development in teaching and learning: e.g. open seminar on learning outcomes and work groups on group the learning environment

(HF System for kvalitetssikring 2003-2004, IFFIK Årlige Studieplaner 2005-2008, HF Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2007- 2009, E-mail correspondence 2010, IFIKK Strategisk plan 2006-2009, IFFIK Studiekvalitetsplaner 2006-2009, IFFIK Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2005-2009).

The overall impression from the quality assurance systemic properties and practices is that extensive work is being done at the level of faculty in general, and specifically at the institute. For example, an institute report gives an example of issues concerning student output and the teaching and learning processes.

> "In the annual plan for 2006 Iffik has decided that work will be targeted so as to accomplish faster student output time in the higher degree levels. This is going to happen through a closer follow-up of students. Student administrative routines shall be improved and the teachers shall to a greater degree be activated so as to reach the aim of the annual plan"."[24] (IFIKK Studiekvalitetsrapport 2005-06: 7).

However, the administrative staff reports concerns that the utility function of the quality instruments are questioned by the academic staff, and as such that their cooperation must be strengthened (IFIKK Studiekvalitetsrapport 2007). Nonetheless, by specifically targeting work on teaching and learning in the annual report template, relevant information and local variation are seen to be accomplishable (IFFIK Studiekvalitetsplan 2009). However, previous reports have also expressed concerns that the UiO quality system in its present shape is not open to extensive simplifications at the faculty and institute levels, but rather that minor local

[24] Authors translation

variations can be applied to the systemic properties (HF Studiekvalitetsrapport 2007). Furthermore, an assessment was made that it is difficult to find a format to the system that is not experienced as a burden to the actors (ibid). In combination, this can potentially impact the actual effect of the practices if participant motivation decreases. Even though documentation and quality practices at institute and faculty level function well, they are not considered to be utilized to their full potential by the appropriate actors.

> "The reports are produced in accordance with systemic properties, but is not read and used as much as wished- apart from the external supervisor reports" (HF Studiekvalitetsrapport 2009:9)

Explanations to this can be found in the reported evaluation saturation, opinion of staff on utility of the documents, but also that the practices of the external programme supervisor contain aspects that holistically captures the teaching and learning processes, and as such is considered meaningful in providing the actors with valuable information.

Furthermore, the presentation of plans, problems and follow-up is clear within the systemic properties, hence facilitating the identification of the relation between them. The relationship between measures and follow-up in the systemic properties is explicitly expressed in an annual faculty report.

> "In the annual student and academic quality report institutes and programmes of study must account for how last years measures were followed up, and identify new measures" (HF Studiekvalitetsrapport 2007: 10)

The information provided in the annual reports at the institute level show a development in templates, as well as changes in the balance between quantitative and qualitative data, were the latest contain more descriptive than numerical facts (IFFIK Studiekvalitetsplan 2006-2007). However, apart from student credit accumulation data, not much is offered in terms of learning outcomes (IFFIK Studiekvalitetsplaner 2006-2009). The reason for this could be that it is an area of the quality assurance instruments that is still under development at the institute and faculty level. As for descriptive data the latest report presents best/worst practice examples with respect to courses, and as such offers the opportunity for learning by example (IFFIK Studiekvalitetsplan 2009).

At IFIKK the practices point to a participatory model of steering with particular attention given to the role of institutional response. Furthermore, communication with the representative of the student commission indicates a close connection between the academic

staff and student body (Email communication October 2010). However, the representative did express a concern, and give examples of experiences where representation, participation and work on quality aspects take the form of a more symbolic, rather than decisive character, as the overall authority rests within the leadership/management and administrational units (ibid).

6.3.4 The institute of Teacher Education and School Development at the Faculty of Education (UV)

Table 6.7 The main elements of the quality assurance practices: soft/applied knowledge field

Quality assurance practices	***Main elements at The institute of Teacher Education and School Development* at The Faculty of Education**
Practices, process and instruments	• Involves all aspects of student and academic quality that are of significance for students (learning process until graduation). • Anchored in the institutional leadership/management/ administrational structures. • Anchored locally within the organisational unit. • Follow the general framework for types of evaluations at UiO in the different institutional units. • From 2009 the faculty annually awards an academic staff member for excellence in pedagogical activity "UV-Fakultetets pris for fremragende undervisning". The award committee is made up of students, academics and leadership/management. • The learning environment project: UV-a good place to learn "Læringsmiljøprosjektet: UV-et godt sted å lære". Report dealing with for example the relationship between teacher - student, student - teacher, and critical work on academic fields, identifying problem areas and makes suggestions on measures. • At ILS (The institute of Teacher Education and School Development): annual evaluations (based on participant evaluations) linked to aim-achievement for programmes of study. • Minor local variations of practices between the programmes of study on who receives the evaluation forms. E.g. in the case of the midterm and end-evaluations at the master studies of subject didactics the students of all but one programme of study send the form to the teacher, whilst one send it to the student and academic administrator. • Academic seminars and meetings focusing on good teaching and procedures for personal feedback (e.g. elements of regular meetings on teaching, colleague supervision and teaching conferences) have led to measures being taken. • Development of course- and programme descriptions. • Reports show that singular cases involving teaching and learning are addressed locally. • Student evaluation (midterm and end) conducted in the shape of

	group meetings, electronic questionnaires and reference group questionnaires, orally and/or in writing. • Ensure feedback early in the process of the first semester: e.g. measures and a plan with measures produced after evaluations. • Use electronic tools such as It's learning conducting quantitative investigations in the student cohort: e.g.70% response rate at a particular programme of study. • Student evaluations are a vital part of the work with the revision of courses: e.g. leading to curriculum development. • An example of an end evaluation of courses show that the instrument contain a balance between specific information asked for (students own effort, academic relevance, learning outcome), and open questions (content, type of work, organization, and assessment. • Seminars: comments and opinions on experiences from actors and workload distribution, recommendations reported, i.e. a curriculum development process leading to suggestions on merging groups together, and voicing a need to make quality measures more concrete. • The external programme supervisor reports standardized template, e.g. descriptive information on observed assessment practices, evaluations and suggestions for improvement measures. Work done through observation and reading of relevant documents, as well as meetings with relevant representative of the academic staff resulting in comments on the procedures and work from an academic perspective. • Reference group consisting of students that have one to two meetings annually with the coordinator of the programme of study (MPEL).
The purpose of practices	• Realizing aims of the educational processes. • Identify weaknesses and strengths in teaching and learning. • To be an instrument for systematic work on quality assurance and development (Paraphrased from Systembeskrivelse for kvalitetssikring av utdanning UV 2005/2007). • Balancing the monitoring and development that is seen as a continual process. • Ensure two-way communication.
Role of actors, communication and information	• Committee of Academic and Student Affairs has the overall responsibility and authority • Institutes are responsible for programmes of study evaluations, course evaluations, and reports. • Responsibility diffused down the system level to relevant actors: e.g. academics and students. • Actors represented through the general representative nature of the institutional structures. • Leadership group: e.g. follow-up on planned measures concerning course portfolios. • At ILS the Committee for programmes of study has the overall

	responsibility and authority of the • The person responsible for courses carries out the mid-term evaluation and creates a summary of findings to the committee for programmes of study • The external programme supervisor is responsible for evaluations of exam and assessment procedures. At ILS they have one per programme of study. • The Commission of the academic field called LPU (The Teacher Education programme of study): a student body active in the quality enhancement work, e.g. a blog with information relevant for the student learning environment, and a report containing information on curriculum issues (teaching methods, sequencing of courses, literature, lectures etc) based on data from student questionnaires. • In general, the data set is highly standardized, contain quantitative and qualitative data, the templates opens up for strong/weak practices. • A balance between fact-oriented and development-oriented information. • The reports have a particular focus in the reporting period, and suggestions for improvement measures, including repeat "offenders". • The external programme supervisor report based on written material and observation, as well as meetings with academic actors presents descriptive data linking the facts with comments on procedures, work methods with resultant summary and recommendations for improvement measures. • Strong link between problems identified and measures in the composition of documents. • At the faculty level developing communication and information distribution is linked to developing web pages at the faculty. • The communication at ILS is distributed vertically and horizontally in written and oral form through formal and informal settings. • Webpages on student information are to have a simple a clear format to ensure good communication.

(UV Systembeskrivelse for utdanninngsvirksomheten 2005/7, UV Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2004-2009, ILS Periodisk programrapport for masterprogrammet 2003-2007, ILS Årsrapporter MPEL 2004, 2006-2009, ILS Ekstern evaluering av MPEL 2008, ILS MPEL Tilsynsrapport 2009-2011. ILS MPEL Sluttvurdering 2009, ILS MPEL referat 26.10.09, ILS PPU Tilsynssensorrapport 2008, ILS PPU periodisk programevaluaring 2004-2008, ILS PPU Tilsynsrapport 2009, ILS PPU Studiekvalitetsrapport 2009, ILS PPU Ekstern evaluering av praktisk pedagogisk utdanning 2008, ILS LAP Årsrapporter 2005-2009, ILS LAP Tilssynsensorrapport 2006-2008, ILS MPEL Studiekvalitetsplaner 2004-2009, ILS PPU og expaed Studiekvalitetsrapport 2007, Email correspondance October 2010, UiO webpage ILS studiekvalitetssystem 22.09.2010, 09.11.2010)

The quality practices at the institute of Teacher Education and School Development (ILS) and the Faculty of Education is extensive. However, actors raise a concern that there might be

parallel processes at work (UV Studiekvalitetsrapport 2008). Furthermore, at faculty level reports show that there is a varying degree of response in student evaluations (UV Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2005-2006, 2007). Furthermore, reports show that the systemic properties of the internal quality assurance system are not necessarily involved in cases concerning complaints/measures on the learning environment, but that these are addressed orally to academic or administrative staff (UV Studiekvalitetsrapporter 2009). If such parallel processes are present, this could affect the motivation of the implicated actors. Hence, there is according to reports a need to identify these potential parallel processes in order to secure the best utilisation of the different practices and results.

Nonetheless, the quality assurance practices offer rich documentation, and focus on both the control and the improvement dimension. Comparatively, the improvement dimension is present to a large degree. For instance, in the quality report templates examples of good/ weak practices in student and academic quality is linked to implemented improvement measures, and/or suggestions for improvement measures (MPEL Studiekvalitetsplan 2004-2009). Another instance is where the external evaluation of the programme of study took the form of a seminar resulting in a report where the main aim was to link evaluation to the opinion of participants on the potential for improvement (MPEL Tilsynsrapport 2008). These are just two of many examples of such practices at the institute. Conclusively, the practices are pragmatic, aimed at the most relevant participants and structured primarily within the confines of the institute itself. The processes are primarily coupled within programmes of study and the leadership/management/administrative units, but naturally involve the main actors in terms of participant evaluations and group meetings. Hence, it is participatory in nature, and facilitates the development of student and academic quality.

6.4. Summary of findings

To sum up, based on the presentation and analysis in this chapter the following are considered main elements of the quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo. The system comprises of several elements that are connected to the organisational leadership/management/unit structure at the university. As authority is decentralised, the relative autonomy of the various organisational units results in local variations on faculty and institute level, be it from faculty to faculty, within the faculty and within the institutes. The internal quality system is embedded in the institutional leadership at all levels, and the students and academic staff first and foremost play a role locally, even though they are

represented in hierarchical management structures and units. Plans, reports and evaluations based on participant evaluations, external programme supervisor reports are vital elements, as well as steering dialogue meeting, academic field meetings and seminars. In addition, at some faculties and institutes student bodies play an integral role in data collection and general work on the quality system, as well as academic field projects and reports aimed at improving the understanding and quality of teaching and learning processes. However, having only sampled one at each institute, variations across faculties and institutes are expected. As such, based on the sampled faculties and institutes, and data collected, the impression is that there is extensive work being done on the quality of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo. Furthermore, it shows that the UiO internal quality system is dynamic, the format and templates are differentiated and seemingly developed-oriented, and as such the work in certain instances become more focused and linked to the overall purposes and aims. The systemic properties contain a varying degree as to where the potential communication of results and measures take place (aim-achievement and follow-up), and is as such differentiated in terms of close-and loose coupling across the system levels. However, at the micro level the participant evaluations creates a close coupling between the actors involved in the processes concerning the teaching, programme and immaterial resources aspects of quality, but the content reported to higher system levels vary in terms of specific measures. This could be due to the type of data, focus and templates designed. What is more, the overall impression is that the result and management aspects of quality are more connected to the intermediary levels of the institution.

Chapter 7 Summary of thesis findings and discussion

> **"It is our view that the first thing universities need to do in the process of becoming a learning organisation is to create a new kind of conversation (Hutchings 2000)." (D´Andrea and Gosling 2005: 45)**

In the next chapter the pedagogical perspectives of theories on human learning and empirical data on quality assurance system and practises at the University of Oslo will be summarised and potential link discussed from an exploratory and interpretative perspective. The material will be presented according to the analytical tool created in the literature review, and the content in the findings will be summarising in table 7.1. In order to identify which aspects of learning theories have been applied, are visible, and have the potential for application, data will be discussed and potential links identified between theories on human learning and quality assurance system and practices in the case of the sampled institutional units at the University of Oslo. The documentation from the institutional level will be presented including four different institutes and faculties representing four different knowledge fields. However, underlying pedagogical perspectives at the national level will also be discussed, but the overall focus in this study will be the practices identified at the University of Oslo. The discussion is suggestive, rather than conclusive, and will be based on the four different aspects of learning theories (behaviourist, cognitive, individual/humanist and social/situational) and the interpretation of their potential link to quality assurance practices presented in chapter three.

7.1 Discussion on aspects of learning theories applied, visible, and potential for application

Before discussing the case of the four institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo, a presentation of the national systemic properties, purpose and role of actors in the quality assurance system will be discussed with respect to the different aspects of learning theories addressed in chapter three.

The three main elements in the Norwegian Quality Assurance system are accountability, accreditation and audits. The first two mechanisms are primarily aimed at monitoring higher education institutions though the intermediary agency (NOKUT), and ensuring that a certain

quality standard is kept. A claim can be made that these are summative elements, aimed at recording facts or declarative knowledge, rather than formative and developmentally steered information. The processes are primarily external, as opposed to the audit dimension that is more interconnected in nature with external and internal institutional quality assurance mechanisms potentially linked to each other. As such, the first two instruments can be interpreted as containing elements that are behaviourist in character in that they influence surface changes in structure and behaviour based on consequentiality. For example in the case of accreditation, the institution must document that certain criteria are met, and if they are they will be accredited. The reinforcement element is strong, as the repercussions for not accommodating requirements mean potential for termination. Furthermore, the educational award on measures to improve student and academic quality administered by NOKUT can be seen to contain elements from behaviourist and social/situational aspects of learning theory as its aim is to stimulate and award practices that lead to improvement not only through signalling and modelling, but also through pecuniary reinforcers. In addition, the processes of institutional audits potentially have more of both summative and formative elements, and as such can contain different learning theory discourses within them. Hence, the main emphasis in this discussion will involve the audit dimension.

The empirical data on the national level show that there was a shift in emphasis from a traditional view of the teaching and learning processes of teacher-directed (lecturer steering the show) to student-directed forms of educational thinking. With the implementation of the Quality Reform, and under the slogan "Perform your Duty-Demand your right", the student was placed centre stage in the educational processes of higher education institutions. As mentioned in chapter five the student was to be given the chance to participate in the development of quality aspects in her learning environment. This role of the student as an increasingly autonomous solo actor corresponds well with individual/ humanist perspectives on learning where the process of self-actualising is reached in conjunction with the learning environment, as well as cognitive aspects of self-regulation. In addition, the Quality Reform explicitly targeted the focus on the student as a means to improve the teaching and learning processes, and as such lifting the student up as a vital participant at the institutional level of the national system.

However, the discourse in the national documents and criteria also contain pedagogical perspectives from other aspects of learning theory, as for example in the focus on developing

the skills and competence of students. This clearly corresponds with cognitive dimensions of learning processes where it shall be structured such that the individual intrinsically learns skills and competences. The new degree and modular structure can serve as an example of these curriculum changes. Furthermore, the changes in teaching and learning processes were incorporated into the quality assurance system and consequently anchored in them, primarily through a focus on the authority distribution in leadership and management structures. As such, complex dynamics and different goals according to site specificity and actors, not only results in the student or academic being put centre stage, but also the managers and administrators. Consequently, a variety of purposes, possibly conflicting at times can be expected. For example, for the student the purpose of the student evaluation can be to be able to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction on that the sequencing of courses offered are coherently structured according to the knowledge level of the student. In contrast, the main purpose for the management can be to ensure that the courses offered were in line with the learning outcome aims in course and programme descriptions (e.g. quantitative output data or grade distribution). These two purposes arguably exemplify different aspects of learning theory. The first cognitive and individual/humanist aspects as they concerns intrinsic learning processes, and the last a behaviourist perspective in terms of the de facto recording of external results of processes. Though these differences cannot be avoided, pedagogical perspectives can assist in understanding them, and potentially help find a consolatory solution for the parties involved.

According to ministerial system documents covered in chapter five practices such as student evaluations, self-evaluations, follow-up issues concerning the learning environment was to be improved as a result of demands on systemic properties, routines and follow-up. These elements correspond not only to cognitive and individual/humanist aspects, but also to social/situational aspects on human learning as they stress the participation of the individual actor, interactive in relation to the learning environment and different groups, and last but not least the importance of following up on matters that are recorded and addressed. Hence, a potential consequence in terms of quality assurance to empower the individual actors to address quality issues in teaching and learning processes they are involved in, combined with criteria articulated by NOKUT on institutional audits explicitly stating that quality assurance should involve a wide range of actors in higher education institutions, involves aspects present in both cognitive, individual/ humanist and social/situational aspects of learning theory. The different criteria referenced in chapter five exemplify the presence of different

learning theory aspects: for example the one stating the active participation of students and the role of the institution in focusing on the total learning environment. This point encompasses aspects from cognitive, individual/humanist and social/situational learning theories all in one criteria. Hence, a claim can be made that even though the student as an actor was given a stronger emphasis in the new policies, the systemic properties has a framework that is holistic, and is as such potentially flexible. However, that depends on how the systemic properties are being translated and put into practice by the actors in the system.

In reference to the individual/humanist aspect of learning the most important potential link is in the role that motivation plays for actors and potential systemic properties. In chapter five examples were given of the establishment of pedagogical development centres as an attempt to link teaching and learning processes with quality assurance practices, but as the story in the introductory chapter illustrates, and individual/humanist theories of learning suggest, the impact on such practices (e.g. pedagogical courses for university professors) will not have a transformational effect for the quality of teaching and learning unless the actors and system structures contain motivational aspects (intrinsically as well as extrinsically). Furthermore, communication between groups and actors are important in social/situational theories on learning, and evaluation reports indicate that systemic properties fall short concerning feedback and communication. Arguably, the role played by motivation affects all relevant actors, and can as such influence the participatory nature of the systemic properties as well. In addition, cognitive theories indicate that a vital aspect in motivating actors is in the perception of meaningfulness attached to practices for the actors involved. Hence, in order for the aim of the reform processes of making the students demand their right and do there duty to actually materialize, and for students to participate in student evaluation it is important that the practices are considered meaningful, as well as to identify and take into account motivational factors and instruments in the quality assurance systemic properties and practices. Hence, cognitivist, individual/ humanist and social/situational theories can potentially shed light on dynamics that can facilitate improvement in that regard.

In contrast to these dimensions, and even with reference to the priorities put forward in the systemic properties of quality assurance are expectations with respect to economic dimensions of efficiency and effectiveness as a result of quality assurance processes. Elements such as accreditation and accountability are meant to be instrumental in monitoring and controlling the actors, and an incentive driven funding system is directed at steering the

actors towards an output-orientation on activities, and potential predictable repercussions if not certain standards are met. These elements can be interpreted as containing aspects from behaviourist theories on learning in that they encompass observing changes in behaviour and responding to them, as opposed to a more internal and holistic transformation that would be applicable in a social/situational perspective. Hence, the discourse on pedagogical perspectives in the national reform processes and quality assurance system are not singular, nor are they straightforward. Rather, they contain complimentary and conflicting purposes and priorities, which can be seen as instrumental in making it difficult to understand the effects of the various processes that have being initiated, evaluated and reported on.

The discourse and examples discussed above show that there are varieties in pedagogical perspectives inherent in system properties at the macro level (Ministry and NOKUT) that potentially affect the micro levels of the higher education institutions. As this variety is unavoidable in a system with interests from different actors and institutions, pedagogical perspectives on these complimentary and conflicting discourses can be instrumental in creating a deeper understanding, and potentially further improve the systemic properties and institutional practices. Hence, a look at the internal quality assurance system properties and practices at four different institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo.

7.1.1 Types of practices

With reference to the analytical tool, the formal quality assurance practises of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo will be addressed in light of theories on human learning. The understanding of the quality assurance practices is enhanced through the theoretical implications of aspects in theories on human learning mainly through the view on institutional quality processes. The following sections will provide examples of potential links addressing each of the four aspects of learning theory: behaviourist, cognitivist, individual/ humanist and social/situational based on an understanding of systemic properties and reported practices at institutional level, and at four different institutes and faculties.

At the institutional level the internal systemic properties and templates for the internal quality assurance practices on teaching and learning are incorporated as an integrated approach on institutional student and academic quality. Based on these facts, combined with factors such as the representativeness of actors in system structures and institutional units, and the broad scope of the quality aspects it can be deducted that the student and academic quality system

operates within a holistic framework. The processes are self-regulatory and required to identify weakness and strengths at all levels and in all educational processes (e.g. joint frameworks for quality assurance of programmes of study and course), and the decentralized structure entails that processes address site-specific needs. The processes are participatory for the teaching and learning community through for example seminars and dialogue meetings. As such, the systemic properties show strong connections to social and situational aspects of learning theories. Furthermore, elements such as the focus on the active involvement of institutional leadership structures are compatible with cognitive aspects that stress the procedural structures as important elements. In addition, by targeting the actors that are involved in the teaching and learning processes specifically (e.g. participant evaluations, personal study plan), the system is open for the opportunity of concentrating the activities around the autonomous actor (e.g. student and academic). Moreover, the institutional award for the accomplishment of high-quality pedagogical and academic standards in the learning environment can be instrumental in sending signals of best practice, and as such adhere to motivational aspects in individual/humanist learning theory. As such, the system has elements of social/ situational, individual/humanist and cognitive aspects of learning theory.

However, the analysis conducted in chapters five and six, identifies a few problem areas in the internal quality assurance system that can be better understood in light of aspects of learning theories. Firstly, reports show that quality processes are lacking in terms of overall awareness of the actors, and further down the system levels this decreases proportionally. In addition, even though specific targets and aims are part of the system, the communication of these, and consequent follow-up is weak. Secondly, reports indicate a varying degree of actual participation by students, and some resentment from actors as to the functionality of the system (e.g. documentation is produced, but not optimally utilized). Two factors can be of importance here, and establish a potential link between quality assurance practices and pedagogical perspectives on learning theory. First, according to cognitive and individual/humanist theories on learning the information produced by the system must be considered relevant and meaningful for the actors if it is to be of use, and for participation to be ensured. Motivation can be accomplish through evidence of consequentiality as well as establishing intrinsically and extrinsically motivating instruments for the actors involved. An example of such an instrument is to ensure that the template caters to site specific needs, and that the information contains formative aspects as well as summative information that is of use to the relevant actors. Hence, the information should contain more than facts on grade

distribution, for example best/weak experiences on the sequencing of courses and proposal for changes. The systemic properties at the University of Oslo contain these elements, but they are practiced to a varying degree across the four institutes and faculties. Secondly, one of the main aspects in social and situational theories is the role that communication and feedback play in the learning process. Hence, it is vital that the systemic properties and practices contain formal and informal lines of communication; information should be easily accessible and considered to relay relevant information for the actors. However, these elements are present to a varying degree across the four institutes and faculties at university. Furthermore, institutional dynamics do not operate in a vacuum, and are dependent and connected to other elements as well. For example, according to the research conducted in this study the level of consequentiality inherent in the systemic properties seem weak. Though the system is anchored in leadership structures that have the authority and responsibility to plan, report and evaluate, the incentives for and consequences of not following though is not explicit, but rather based on actors being intrinsically motivated to perform according to requirements. According to behaviourist theories consequentiality is a vital element influencing behaviour and change, and the weakness of external incentives can as such be instrumental in decoupling the internal quality assurance system and practices from the teaching and learning processes. Hence, a strengthening of systemic properties that target follow-up and carrying out measures can strengthen the coupling in the quality processes to a significant degree. However, in light of individual/humanist theories this should not be done at the expense of the level of autonomy enjoyed by system and institutional structures and actors. Again, the systemic properties and practices show how they, in light of pedagogical perspectives on human learning, are complex, sometimes complimentary, and as in the last example potentially conflicting.

The four institutes and faculties sampled in this study representing four different knowledge fields all operate within the same formal systemic properties of internal institutional quality assurance. However, due to the decentralised nature and relative autonomous status of the institutional units and actors, some of the systemic properties and quality assurance practices differ between the units. Based on the research conducted in this study, the institutes and faculties have some commonalities and indicates presences of the four theories on learning to a greater or lesser degree. However, an interpretation is made as to which elements seem to be dominating, rather than being the only one potentially linking quality assurance practices of teaching and learning to pedagogical perspectives on theories of human learning.

At the Institute of Physics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences the students are involved directly in participant evaluation as students, initiators and evaluator, and as such show an application of quality practices on teaching and learning that can be linked to individual/humanist aspects of learning theory. Furthermore, the practices (templates and actual reporting) indicate a high level of fact-oriented information collection, and what can thus be interpreted as external behaviour change indicators, rather than more development-oriented and intrinsic processes. Hence, aspect of behaviourist theories seem strongly connected to the practices according to the findings in this study. However, the level of consequentiality in the practices is uncertain and therefore leaves out a vital element of the behaviourist aspect of learning theory. Even though a lot of documentation is produced through plans, evaluations and reports, it is not apparent from the systemic properties and evaluation reports how for example the academic staff makes use of/are obliged to make use of the documentation with respect to the actual teaching and learning situation. This can be due to limits in data set, or that practices happen in local informal arenas.

At the Institute of Clinical Dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry the overall impression of the research conducted in this study is that behaviourist and cognitive aspect are the most dominant aspects that can be linked to the quality assurance practices. This is due to the nature of the information that the systemic properties and practices produced at this institute are according to the findings in this study primarily aimed at fact-finding declarative knowledge. These are important in order to identify practices, but do not offer much in terms of follow-up measures or consequentiality. However, some elements of individual/humanist aspects are present as for example an award to the academic field that can serve as a signal motivating other actors to improve performance. In addition, cognitive influence can be discerned in terms of the emphasis on structural properties, best/worst practice and anchoring the procedures in previous knowledge and quality system. Hence, there are indications of a limited emphasis on the participatory communities of practice present at other levels of the institution.

At the Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Arts and Ideas at the Faculty of Humanities the overall systemic properties and practices indicate a holistic quality assurance system. First of all the balance between the aspects of learning theory in practices is clearly defined at these institutional units according to the findings in this study. As in the other institutes, the quality processes are anchored in the institutional leadership structures

corresponding with cognitive aspects of learning theory. However, in addition the proposal for an incentive driven instrument to get academics to gain pedagogical competence is indicative of a link and coupling of behaviourist and individual/humanist theories on learning (the only institute in this study where such a clear line of causality between problem, measure and actual response was encountered in reports). Furthermore, the research indicate that the practices are participatory in nature involving all relevant actors (students, academics, leadership/ management/ administration) in dialogue meetings, seminars as well as institutional plans, reports and other quality assurance documentation This indicates influences from social/situational theories on learning. However, reports show that the utility function of the practices are questioned by core actors, that evaluation saturation potentially effect motivation, potentially indicating that increasing elements from cognitive and individual/humanist aspects of learning theory such as meaningfulness and motivation can provide means to improve the practices further.

At the Institute of Teacher Education and School Development at the Faculty of Education the overall practices indicate an emphasis on social/situational and individual/humanist aspects of learning theory. Though responsibilities are anchored throughout the system structures, the templates and practices emphasis site-specificity in terms of the actual processes. Furthermore, the reports show that feedback and communication are priorities, both from a student perspective, and from the perspective of other actors. However, the reported concern of parallel processes indicates that a strengthening of focus on structural issues, and as such cognitive aspects, can be beneficial. These can include identifying previous practices and see how they are currently accommodated in the systemic properties, and potentially integrate them more coherently into the present system and practices.

7.1.2 Purpose

This section will address the quality assurance practices on teaching and learning in light of learning theories from the perspective of purpose. The understanding of purpose in the quality assurance practices is potentially enhanced through implications of the four different theoretical aspects of learning theories. Hence, this section will provide examples of potential links between quality assurance practices and pedagogical perspectives on learning theories addressed in the purposes identified at the University of Oslo, and the faculties and institutes sampled in the case.

At the system level of the institutional quality assurance system the main purposes are identified as being to control and monitor, and to improve and develop. These are potentially conflicting purposes on the surface, but from the perspective of theories on human learning these can be complimentary as well. For example from the perspective of behaviourist theories of learning, the surface observation of change results in the identification of declarative knowledge of the quality processes taking place, and in order to completely comply with this perspective a predicted response, or at least a consequence, of a certain behaviour or practice must be connected to the processes. Consequently, the control dimension can be coupled with the development dimension and as such be accomplished through practices that are structured with causality contingencies. Following the institutional thermostat imagery of Birnbaum mentioned in the literature review, the temperature in the black box can be recorded, and the institution can respond to problems identified.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind the different types of qualities that the student and academic quality assurance system is meant to address. The six quality aspects offer guidelines for this differentiation, but as some of the processes relating to teaching and learning are interconnected, the task of simplifying for the sake of simplifying can be futile. Hence, the purposes can be interpreted as being context-specific and local according to institutional unit as well as process and actor. From that perspective, the purposes are in line with social/situational theories of human learning emphasising site-specificity. However, it is interesting to notice that though the student is to be in focus, the quality aspects themselves do not directly pertain to student quality aspects that are formative. Rather, they are summative and output-oriented. As such it is not necessarily the internal transformation of cognitive and individual /humanist aspects that are most present, but rather behavioural aspects of learning theory. Nevertheless, as stated in chapter five the purposes are holistic, as side by side with goal-accomplishment, identifying weakness and strength, is the aim of systematic work on quality assurance and- development. However, these purposes potentially become hollow if they do not contain actual practices to that effect.

At the Institute of Physics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences the purposes of the practices according to this study can be summarised as follows. First of all they are meant to enhance the quality of the learning environment, specifically targeting the students as a means to gather valuable information. This corresponds to social/situational aspects of learning in its local anchorage, and individual/humanist in its centring around the autonomous

actor (e.g. the student). Furthermore, the other purposes identified are development-oriented both in terms of their inherent properties and potential consequences. For example, the templates are highly standardized linking practice to aim, and targeting curriculum development, and hence possibly showing aspects of behavioural learning theories. According to the research conducted in this study the purposes of the practices at the Institute of Clinical Dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry is to be measurable, have local relevance, follow-up, flexible and ongoing to mention some. Hence, the purposes indicate that they contain elements congruent with all of the aspects of learning theories. However, based on the study of the Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Arts and Idea at the Faculty of Humanities, the purposes indicate the same, though they are more specific as to the participatory aspects such as facilitation through dialogue and groups (i.e. communities of practice). Last, but not least, according to research findings, the same pattern emerges at the Institute of Teacher Education and School development at the Faculty of Education. Hence, this indicates that indirectly or directly the purposes seem to have identified important aspects of learning theory that can be instrumental in creating valid and effective quality assurance practices by incorporating elements from all of them (conscientiously or unconscientiously). However, the purposes in themselves, as for example the practices of academic student plans, are according to this study not enough to ensure that quality processes are taking place. As behaviourist and individual/humanist theories on learning indicate the level of consequentiality and motivation must also be present in the systemic properties and practices to have an effect on the quality of teaching and learning processes. Furthermore, behaviourist and social/situational theories indicate that type of information asked for and acquired, and the way the documentation is communicated can play an important role in this regard.

7.1.3 Institutional conversation

With reference to the analytical tool, the quality assurance practises of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo will be addressed in light of theories on human learning with the focus on institutional conversation. The understanding of the role of actors, communication and information in the quality assurance practices at the sampled institutional units is discussed through the theoretical implications of theories on human learning. The following section will provide examples of potential links addressing each of the four aspects of learning theory.

The plans, evaluations and reports on the institutional level indicate that the quality assurance system and its practices are participatory, involve all relevant actors in the teaching and learning processes, and are site-specific. As such, based on the research conducted in this study the systemic properties open up for the actors to be facilitators in creating student and academic quality the University of Oslo. The Quality Network, the Learning Environment Committee and dialogue meetings are examples of groups and practices that can ensure wide participation at the institutional level. Even though the institutional level is concerned with the monitoring of the system, the documentation in this study indicate mechanisms in place coupling the lower level of the organization with the higher levels, and as such facilitating cooperation across the levels and actors. Hence, the research findings indicate a strong presence of factors that correspond with social/situational theories of learning at the University of Oslo. However, it is not clear whether the quantitative and qualitative documentation produced impacts the system as declarative or procedural knowledge. As such, despite the participatory nature it is not clear what the level of consequentiality is for the actors involved. Based on the research conducted in this thesis the reporting practices can potentially contain a stronger link with behaviourist and individual/humanist learning theories if the systemic properties provide stronger signals as to potential repercussions and level of motivation produced.

At the Institute of Physics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences there are indications of quality practices being closely linked to the relevant actors, and especially the student commission potentially playing a decisive role in student evaluations. These are made available on the internet by the student commission together with a vast amount of information that is relevant for students with respect to the learning environment. As such, the practices indicate a strong correspondence with individual/humanist theories and social/ situational theories on human learning in that students are at the centre of the activities, and the whole community of practice is considered relevant for the learning environment. However, as alluded to in chapter six, these practices are not functioning to their full potential *unless* the information acquired is utilized by relevant actors such as academic staff and institutional leadership. Hence, the coupling of the practices as graphically represented by Massy in the literature review to systemic properties that concern consequentiality and motivational factors can, according to behaviourist and individual/humanist perspectives, can potentially be beneficial (Massy 2010).

Based on the research in this study the practices at the Institute of Clinical Dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry are also conducted according to local relevance. The systemic properties follow formal lines of communication, however the data collected do not indicate a high level of participation other than in the formal system structures. The reports show an emphasis on declarative knowledge, and formative aspects are less distinct. As such, the findings indicate surface changes being recorded, but potentially without procedural emphasis. This corresponds to a behaviourist perspective, but the level of consequentiality in the system is according to this study not apparent. As reports have been made of weaknesses in feedback and follow-up measures, from behaviourist and individual/ humanist theories in learning this study indicates that a stronger focus on consequentiality and motivation can be beneficial for the effectiveness of the practices.

According to the research conducted in this thesis the practices at the Institute of Philosophy, Classics and History of Arts and Ideas at the Faculty of Humanities have a high level of participation from academic staff and students. However, reports are made that these can be considered to be more symbolic than real, as the leadership/management/administrational actors and structures have the overall responsibility and authority over the quality practices (apart from executing participant evaluations). This can indicate a decoupling of the actors and practices, and according to learning theory decrease the participatory and facilitate aspects in them. However, according to this study communication takes an informal and formal role, as well as written and oral. As such, there are elements of both individual/ humanist and social/situational learning theories in the way actors operate and communicate. Furthermore, reports show that there are concerns of information overload and actors legitimization of practices. Though a certain level of consequentiality has been put in place that correspond to behaviourist theories of learning (e.g. incentives for academic staff to fulfil requirements of conducting midterm evaluation), a stronger focus on motivational factors (internal and external) can according to research findings potentially improve the systemic properties and practices.

At the Institute of Teacher Education and School Development at the Faculty of Education plans, reports and evaluations indicates a high level of participation by all relevant actors. Moreover, based on the research conducted in this study the practices and communication is site specific and as such have strong elements of individual/humanist aspects of learning theory as well as social/situational. Furthermore, institute reports indicate standardized

templates and a balance between declarative and procedural information combined with a coupling between plans for measures and follow-up. According the findings in this study the student academic commission plays an active role in quality matters, especially as an information bank on knowledge relevant for the learning environment. As social/situational theories suggest these are vital elements in learning processes, and as such of consequence in an attempt at creating an institutional conversation. Simultaneously, the research suggests that faculty level activities ensure an holistic focus on student and academic quality matters. The faculty award has the potential to function as a signal, or be a model, of best practice on teaching and learning processes, and the learning environment project can offer valuable information to the institutional actors corresponding with both of the abovementioned pedagogical perspectives.

7.1.4 Table and summary of findings

The discussions in the sections above are not aimed at comparing or evaluating different systemic properties and practices at the respective institute and faculties. Rather, the aim of the sampling strategy was to identify and map different types of emphasis and practices in order to explore different potential links with pedagogical perspectives on human learning. As such the documentation is not applicable for comparison, but rather as suggestions and interpretations on implications of different types of practices. Hence, in table 7.1 the major categories of theories on human learning are related to quality assurance practices at the four institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo based on an adaptation of the analytical tool presented in chapter 2.2. From the previous discussion the content is summarized with the focus on three main elements: quality practices, purpose and institutional conversation.

Table 7.1 below indicates that the four different aspects of learning theory have been applied and/or are visible in the quality assurance practices at the sampled institutional units at the University of Oslo. However, it also indicates that social/situational aspects (e.g. dialogue meetings, seminars, academic field groups, participatory- and facilitatory processes) are dominant in terms of application, but that other aspects are visible. Furthermore, the research in this thesis indicates that the decentralized and relative autonomous nature of the system, the close coupling with respect to the quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at the micro level of the sampled institutional units at the university creates a setting for context specific learning between academic staff, students and leadership/management/administrators which comply with both social/situational and individual/humanist perspectives.

Table 7.1 Summary of general findings at the University of Oslo

Q A Practices ***Aspects of L T***	***Potential link:*** ***Types of practices*** ***Purpose*** ***Institutional conversation***	***Applied***	***Visible***	***Potential for application***
Behaviourist	Incentive driven		X	X
	Fact-oriented	X		
	Predictable behaviour		X	X
	Control	X		
	Consequentiality		X	X
Cognitivist	Activity-driven		X	X
	Structural	X		
	Declarative/procedural documentation	X		X
	Internal change		X	X
Individual and Humanist	Motivational		X	X
	Internal transformation in interaction with environment		X	X
	From individual actors to the whole institution	X		
Social and situational	Structural	X		
	Motivational		X	X
	Participatory	X		
	Holistic change	X		
	Individual actors, whole institution, but site specific.	X		
	Informal and formal	X		

Based on the research conducted potential links that according to this study are not applied to a great degree can be important to address and understand in order to improve the design of the systemic properties and practices. The different dimensions of practices, purposes and institutional conversation show that there is potential for applying aspects, especially in terms of consequentiality in behaviourist theories and motivation in individual/humanist theories. For example, the table indicates that according to behaviourist theories on learning the systemic properties and practices at the sampled institutional units lacks incentive-driven practices, understanding of causality between problems, plans, reports and evaluations, as well as measures to ensure consequentiality in the institutional conversation. According to the interpretation of cognitivist learning theory and the empirical findings in this study, internal change processes within the institutional units are limited, and activity-driven practices of the individual are inconclusive in terms of for example the perception of meaningfulness by

actors involved. Furthermore, the study suggests that the motivational aspects in individual/humanist and social/ situational learning theories are weak in terms of links with quality assurance systemic properties and practices.

Furthermore, the table and discussion indicate that different elements of the aspects can address different issues and problems in the quality assurance systemic properties and practices that can be of consequence for the teaching and learning processes, and as such it is important to have an open and flexible framework for the practices to operate in. Moreover, the research suggests that different purposes at different levels and institutional units can contain both complimentary and conflicting processes and reactions that can be addressed by a variety of aspects of learning theory dependent on level and actors. However, the research indicates that by using learning theories as a looking lens, the differentiated nature of purposes and expectations combined with the multiplicity of problems and practices partly contributes to the difficulty of establishing causality in the internal quality assurance system at the university. As pointed out previously, using the imagery of Birnbaum, it is difficult to establish what is going on in the black box (Birnbaum 1988). Hence, according to the findings in this study the institutional processes of practices, their impact as well potential predictable measures create a two-way dilemma as the system operates in cooperation between different levels and actors at the institutes, faculty and university. However, though the pedagogical perspectives on human learning to some extent complicate matters, the research conducted in this thesis indicate that they also offer the opportunity to identify possible remedies to inefficiencies in the systemic properties and practices at the institutional units focused on. An example is the identified potential of strengthening the inherent consequentiality (behaviourist perspective) and internal and external motivational factors (individual/humanist perspective) in the quality assurance systemic properties and practices. In addition, the social/situational perspectives indicate the importance of strategically using different types of information (procedural/declarative), and communication in order to obtain a participatory environment for relevant actors.

7.2 Conclusive remarks and implications

From a pedagogical perspective institutional behaviour in terms of quality assurance systemic properties can be better understood through theories on human learning by offering a deeper understanding of processes at play with respect to the quality assurance practices on teaching and learning in the sampled institutional units at the University of Oslo. Simultaneously, the

research indicates that learning theories correspond with elements in institutional theory such as the diffusion of structural authority in the conceptual construct of the Evaluative State, self-regulation mechanisms, and the importance of communication and feedback loops in a learning organisation to mention some (Neave 2009, Birnbaum 1988, Massy 2010, Dill and Beerkens 2010). This can contribute to strengthen the argument for the potential link between pedagogical perspectives in theories of human learning and quality assurance practices on teaching and learning with respect to the sampled institutional units at the University of Oslo. The discussion on the potential link between pedagogical perspectives on theories of human learning and quality assurance practices in the sampled institutional units at the University of Oslo offers some suggestions as to what the answer to some of the potential link can be. However, the identified links are suggestive rather than conclusive.

The overall institutional plans, quality system structures, evaluations and reports on the macro level of the organisation give the impression of the existence of structures, processes and dynamics that can be found in all the four aspects of learning theories. First of all, the study indicates that the purpose and content in the internal quality assurance system contain instruments that are summative as well as formative. Arguably, summative aspects are closely linked to the fact-oriented and rational element of behaviourist theories as they are geared at identifying mechanical changes in behaviour and surface transformations. Based on the research conducted in this thesis the actors are involved in work aimed at monitoring that the specifics of the system are being met. For example, the mandate of the University's Board and documentation of facts correspond with a behaviourist perspective in terms of identifying potential changes in the behaviour of the systemic properties and its actors. However, The University's Studies Committee works discursively and in cooperation with the Learning Environment Committee and as such indicates representation from the variety of actors within the institution. Based on the interpretations discussed this corresponds with cognitive and social/situational theories in terms of active participation of actors (cognitive), and communities of practice (social/situational).

Furthermore, based on this study the formative elements in the internal quality system have commonalities with cognitive, individual/ humanist and social/situational aspects of learning theories in that they are preoccupied with internal and contextual transformations of actors involved. In the context of this study it is not only the individual learner that is the focus of the learning process, but rather the institution as a whole. Hence, indicating that the different

aspects of leaning theory can facilitate a deeper understanding of the quality processes of teaching and learning taking place at the four institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo. The discussion above and table 7.1 indicate that systemic properties and practices contain aspects of social/situational theories catering for the contextual variations in the institution, and involves the actors in a community of practice through the involvement of relevant participants. Last, but not least, the system documents contain examples and templates for best/weak practices that can be considered instruments connected to a combination of behaviourist and social/situational aspects of learning theories. As a result of the declarative identification of behaviour and consequent assessment of these, the opportunity to create a modelling effect is present that corresponds with individual/ humanist perspectives. Based on the interpretations in this study the best and weak practices can facilitate change through observation of actors and practices, and learning within the institution can occur amongst actors through an institutional conversation. These examples indicate the level of differences in potential and applicability of practices dependent on institutional units and actors.

The *interpretatio*n based on knowledge of theories on human learning, the structure, systemic- and formal properties and practices, and interaction between actors in the internal quality assurance system at the four institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo indicate discourses and information on institutional traditions relevant for the internal quality assurance practices. As an example, the quality assurance practices in the hard/applied field indicated to be closely rooted in previous traditions, and the practices were potentially influenced by knowledge field orientation in that it was interpreted as being fact-oriented and quantitative in nature. The same applies to the hard/pure field where quantitative and summative elements in the practices seemed strong. On the other hand, in the soft/applied and soft/pure fields practices indicated a larger degree of qualitative and formative aspects in the institutional documents. Though this study is not designed for comparison these external trends can potentially explain some of the weaknesses in terms of feedback and follow-up, as procedural knowledge can possibly contain valuable information and facilitate more development-oriented practices than declarative knowledge. Though reports indicate that the internet is considered to be an important tool in acquiring, processing and communicating quality assurance practices it can potentially be given a clearer role as an easily accessible instrument for all actors that deal with the quality of teaching and learning, and as such couple the practices even tighter to the teaching and learning processes at the University of Oslo.

The purposes articulated in the institutional quality documents on student and academic quality indicate that teaching and learning processes are one of the main targets for the quality assurance system at the university, and that the effectiveness of the system is linked to the structure of leadership, management and administration. However, this study indicates that it is in the actions of human resources (leadership, management and administration, academic staff and students) involved directly in the teaching and learning processes that ultimately play a decisive role. The story of the university professor with a great dislike of institutional interference and pedagogical theory show exactly how vital this focus is. Arguably, one can assume that he does not perform quality practices with the same vigour as a professor of the opposite opinion. As such, the knowledge of human behaviour and learning processes, responses and cognitive development potentially can enhance the understanding of the functionality of the actors involved in the quality processes and practices of teaching and learning. However, as the discussion in the previous sections indicates the apparent lack of consequentiality, and motivation corresponding to behaviourist and individual/humanist theories respectively, possibly influence the effectiveness of the quality system on teaching and learning processes at institutes and faculties at the University of Oslo. However, if these were thoroughly integrated into the formal systemic properties the practices can be instrumental in increasingly changing or guiding the behaviour of the actors involved, be it explained through rationality, bounded rationality, principal-agent relationships or resource dependency theories.

Referring back to the quote in the beginning of the introductory chapter "The map is not the territory" the following scenario is illustrative. The map is obviously not the territory in the same way as theories on human learning are not the quality assurance practices. However, in the same way as the map attempts at simplifying the three-dimensional complexities of hills and fiords, the practices, processes and theories are linked as they can attempt at managing and simplifying complex dynamics that are part of everyday work with the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions. From a platonic perspective the practices can be seen as representations of reality, even though the representations themselves in reality are more complex in nature. Furthermore, the purposes and instruments of the quality assurance practises create a map in which the quality processes can take place. These processes involves the institutional dynamics and actors that are influenced and steered through the design of the quality framework (map), hence pedagogical perspectives in theories on human learning can potentially create a wider understanding of the process at play; be it the institutional-,

systemic properties, or actors involved (the actual territory). Furthermore, as the map is not the territory, one cannot expect it to be a full representation of reality. Hence, the quality assurance practices are a representation of reality, and the purpose can consequently be to make the representation as accurate, efficient and effective as possible. A claim is made in this thesis that a greater foci on theories of human learning can contribute in achieving this within the conceptual construct of the Evaluative State.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Table of major categories of learning theory (Adapted from Merriam and Caffarella 1991 quoted in Smith 1999 in D´Andrea, V.M. In Westerheijden et al 2007: 214).

Aspect	*Behaviourist*	*Cognitivist*	*Humanist*	*Social and situational*
Learning theories	Thorndike, Pavlov, Watson, Guthrie, Hull, Tolman, Skinner	Koffka, Kohler, Lewin, Piaget, Ausubel, Bruner, Gagne	Maslow, Rogers	Badura, Lave and Wenger, Salomon
View of the learning process	Change in behaviour	Internal mental process (including insight, information processing, memory and perception)	A personal act to fulfil potential	Interaction/observation in social contexts. Movement from the periphery to the centre of a community of practice
Purpose in education	Produce behavioural change in desired direction	Develop capacity and skills to learn better	Become self-actualised, autonomous	Full participation in communities of practice and utilisation of resources
Educators role	Arranges environment to elicit desired response	Structures content of learning activity	Facilitates development of whole person	Works to establish communities of practice in which conversation and participation can occur

Appendix II: Mail to institutes at the University of Oslo

Til den det berører.

Jeg er masterstudent på programmet M.Phil i høyere utdanning ved Pedagogisk Forskningsinstitutt, Det Utdanningsvitenskaplige Fakultet, og samler for tiden inn materiale til oppgaven min. Deres Institutt er et av fire institutter på Universitetet i Oslo som er valgt som analyseenheter i oppgaven på grunnlag av følgende teoretiske kriterier: *hard ren, myk ren, hard anvendt* og *myk anvendt* kunnskapsområde.

Jeg har følgende forskningsspørsmål:

"*What are the potential links between pedagogical theory and quality assurance practices of teaching and learning at the University of Oslo?"*

Da jeg skal skrive en ren dokumentanalyse er jeg på jakt etter skriftlig materiale (hovedsakelig rapporter, planer, studentevalueringer o.a.) vedrørende kvalitetssikringsarbeidet ved deres institutt. Alt materiale vil bli behandlet ut fra vanlig forskningsetisk praksis. Tilhørende fakultet vil bli navngitt, men instituttene vil *om ønskelig* ikke bli navngitt, men presentert som et institutt innenfor et gitt kunnskapsområdet. Vennligst se ovenfor. Oppgaven er ikke en evaluering av kvalitetssikringssystemet, men snarere en utforskning av ulike typer praksis sett i lys av pedagogisk teori.

Har du/dere mulighet til å hjelpe meg med å få tilgang til dokumenter som er del av deres kvalitetssikringssystem? Setter pris på tilbakemelding senest innen 15. September.

Vennligst ikke nøl med å ta kontakt hvis dere har noen spørsmål.

I håp om positiv respons!

Med vennlig hilsen,

Ane B Lillehammer

M.Phil student ved PFI

Utdanningsvitenskaplige Fakultet

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Appendix III: Mail to academic student commission (Fagutvalg)

Til den det berører

Jeg jobber for tiden med en masteroppgave i høyere utdanning ved Pedagogisk Forskningsinstitutt ved Det Utdanningsvitenskaplige Fakultet. Mitt forskningsspørsmål er:

> *"What is the potential link between quality assurance practices and pedagogical theory at the University of Oslo?"*

Oppgaven er ikke en evaluering av kvalitetssikringssystemet, men snarere en utforskning av ulike typer praksis sett i lys av pedagogisk teori.

I den forbindelse ønsker jeg å kartlegge kvalitetssystemets praksis ved fire fakulteter/ institutter, og jeg lurte på om dere har noen skriftlige rapporter eller vurderinger fra det arbeidet dere har gjort som (fag)utvalg med kvalitetssikring av studier ved deres institutt. Eventuelt ville jeg sette stor pris på om dere kunne svare på følgende spørsmål:

- Hvilken rolle synes dere at dere spiller innenfor studiekvalitetsarbeidet ved deres fakultet/institutt?
- Hvilke oppgaver inngår i dette arbeidet?

Setter pris på tilbakemelding senest innen 22. Oktober.

Deres svar vil bli behandlet med anonymitet og innenfor standard forskningsetisk praksis. Vennligst ikke nøl med å ta kontakt hvis dere har noen spørsmål.

På forhånd tusen takk!

Med vennlig hilsen,

Ane B Lillehammer

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Appendix IV General facts about the Norwegian Higher Education and Quality Assurance System.

Society and Governance
Parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. Scandinavian welfare state with strong social democratic traditions with an emphasis on values such as equity and equality. After the second world war progressed from elite to a mass system of higher education. Primarily state-owned institutions. Underwent a comprehensive reform in 2000-2005 called the Quality Reform where institutions were granted a high level of autonomy. Part of the Bologna process adopting for example a new degree structure (Bachelor, Master, PhD), grading system (ECTS) and quality assurance policies (ENQA, EQMF).

Main Actors
The Ministry of Education and Research, The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR), Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU), the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, the Research Council of Norway, The Norwegian Network for Private Higher Education Institutions (NPH), the higher education institutions and students.
7 universities, 5 specialized university institutions, 27 university colleges as well as 25 private (non-for profit) higher education institutions that receive state funding.

Legal framework
Private and public institutions coordinated under a joint legal framework: *Act relating to universities and university colleges (2005)* (Lov om Universiteter og Høyskoler) with joint provisions on purpose and scope, stakeholders roles, responsibilities, obligations and governance.

Funding
Institutions receive support from the state according to an incentive-based funding system. The system consists of three main components: base (60%), research (14%) and education (25%). The last two are calculated with a focus on institutional performance in terms of output results.
The State Educational Loan Fund provides student loans and stipends.
No tuition fees are charged at the state-owned institutions save a symbolic amount to student welfare-organisations.

Level of participation:
31 % of the population between the ages 19-24 attended higher education in 2009-2010.
27, 3 % of the population from the age of 16 had attained the level of higher education in 2009.
12, 5 % of students attend private higher education institutions.

(Government webpage, SSB webpage, Lovdata webpage 23.06.2010/ 26.10.2010, St. meld. Nr 7 2007-2008)

Appendix V General facts about the University of Oslo.

Governance:

University Board with 11 members consisting of academic, administrative/technical staff, student body representatives, 4 external members and the Rector as the chairperson. The University Director functions as a secretary for the board. *The rector* is elected and responsible for academic matters and official representation. *The University Director* is appointed and functions as the administrative official.
University status that entails the authority to abolish and/or establish programmes of study and courses.
Faculties: Humanities, Law, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Medicine, Dentistry, Social Sciences, Theology and Education. The 8 faculties are divided into centres and institutes.
Participants: approximately 27 7000 students, 3000 academic- and 1600 administrative staff.
Other facts:
3 museums and a University Library.
8 National Centres of Excellence in Research
3 Nobel Prize Winners
Presents itself as rich on tradition, as well as the oldest and largest higher education institution in Norway.
Ranking Score according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2009 (Shanghai Jiao Tong):
Number 1 in Norway, 3 in Scandinavia, 18 in Europe, and 65 in the world
(UiO webpage 02.11.2010, NOKUT webpage 03.11.2010).

Appendix VI: Summary of main elements of the quality system at the University of Oslo.

Measures

Frequency

Instrument

Responsibility to conduct

- Mid-term course evaluation

Every time the course is offered

Participant (student) evaluation

Person responsible for course/ head of institute

- Periodical evaluation course

First and second time course is offered, afterwards regularly

- Participant (student) evaluation – Summary of quantitative output data – Summary assessment

Person responsible for course/ head of institute

- Annual evaluation programme of study

Annually

- Participant evaluation, including student reception and information

- Summary of quantitative output data – Summary assessment

Programme study management/Faculty

- Periodical evaluation of programme of study

Minimum every fourth year

Contains self-evaluation and external evaluation, with recommendation on the continued management of the programme of study.

Programme study management/Faculty

- External supervisor

Annually/rotation

Monitor exams and examiners

External supervisor / head of institute/faculty

- Student satisfaction survey

2005 and 2007, afterwards regularly

Evaluation of the learning environment and student satisfaction encompassing the whole institution

The department for student and academic affairs

In addition, all institutes, faculties, and the macro level of the institution shall develop goals and measures for the student and academic quality work annually, evaluate, the measures, analyze the aim achievement and develop annual reports with suggested follow-up measures.

(Translated directly from Kvalitetssystem for Utdanningsvirksomheten ved Universitetet i Oslo 2007)